

Change and delay

GIUSEPPE TURANI and LUIGI ZANDA (Editors)
L'Annuario Italiano
1084pp. Milan: Mondadori. L95,000

Italian life is particularly rich in dramatic events and peripeteia; everything seems in continual effervescence and change. Yet the basic structures are remarkably stable. A joke popular among disabused correspondents, dyspeptic from a diet of ephemera, was until recently this: "After a week away, everything has changed; after five years, nothing has changed."

L'Annuario Italiano, edited by two well-known journalists, Giuseppe Turani and Luigi Zanda, is a laudable effort to put at least a yearly perspective and some order into this deceptive chaos. It mobilizes a great many journalistic talents and covers politics, society and economics. Each section contains a miniature history of the main relevant institutions, of the principal problems, and of the central protagonists. The political section, for instance, has a brief and useful political history of the year in question (1983), of the political parties, plus portraits of the leading personages. Italian governments, and their members and dates, are listed; and miniature biographies of members of the Chamber and Senate, plus much more information, are liberally provided.

L'Annuario, of which this is the first edition, is probably destined to become an extremely

useful instrument for those who follow Italian affairs. A few changes might make it positively essential. As it stands, some of the articles are not sufficiently complete and are too subjective, showy and impressionistic. There is no general introduction to orient the reader or explain the purpose of the work. The layout and typeface are unpleasant and give the book a cheap and improvised appearance: the type could be smaller and tighter; the space gained could be used for diagrams and graphs; these would make the statistics more relevant and readable. L'Annuario has perhaps not yet decided whether it is to be a showpiece for journalistic verve or a real yearbook. At L95,000 and 1,084 pages, it should decide, and quickly.

G.N.

The *Catalogo delle edizioni dell'editore Roma, Piazza del caprettari 70, 1964-1984* is the fourth catalogue of limited editions published by Enzo Crea and Benedetta Orig. Crea's private press, L'elefante. Arnaldo Petrucci's foreword, "Bibliomane Petrucci" followed by an illustrated, descriptive list of publications including current prices for books in print. Among the volumes currently available are Raniero Gnoli's *Marmora Rossa*, Filippo Maria Pontani's translation of the *Aeneid* with twelve illustrations by Rocco Guttuso and Antonio Lanzoni's novel *La* winner of the Premio Sila in 1983.

Italiane del XVI secolo, to give it its full title – is organized by the Laboratorio per la Bibliografia Retrospectiva, a section of the Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo Unico delle Biblioteche Italiane e per le Informazioni Bibliografiche, with the collaboration of about a thousand public and private libraries in Italy (more than 90 per cent of the total). It is conceived as a short-title catalogue on the British model, and the influence of the most recent of the British Library's short-title series, the *Eighteenth-Century Short Title Catalogue* (ESTC), is visible in a couple of fundamental features.

To begin with, the results of the census are being prepared in machine-readable form, and will eventually be published both conventionally and on microfiche. There is at present no bibliographical data-base in Italy (though the compilers of the *Censimento* have a project for this, too), but the census material, once published, could easily be incorporated into an already existing data-base, such as BLAISE (British Library Automated Information Service).

Secondly, the *Censimento*, like ESTC, aims to include not only books and pamphlets, but also all single-sheet publications, such as broadsheets and proclamations, a type of item not systematically covered in earlier British Library STCs, including the Italian one. It departs from, and I believe improves on,

the ESTC model in one important respect, the use, at least experimentally in the compilatory stage, of the "fingerprint", a non-bibliographical method of discriminating between editions which has an important future in the short-title type of catalogue.

A valuable spin-off of the *Censimento* is the stimulus given to small Italian libraries to catalogue, or re-catalogue accurately, their sixteenth-century material. This will be of great practical help to scholars working in Italy, even before publication of the complete *Censimento*.

At present the census is confined to the holdings of Italian libraries. The compilers realize that many Italian sixteenth-century editions survive only in copies outside Italy, and intend, when they have finished the census of Italian libraries, to see how they can incorporate these foreign holdings into the *Censimento*.

Work on the *Censimento* began in 1980 and the active compiling of the census is now well under way. Those responsible estimate that it will be at least ten years before they are ready to proceed with the publication of the complete data. Scholars all over the world would rejoice if they could be persuaded to begin partial publication on microfiche before the *Censimento* is complete. The microfiches could be updated as necessary, on the model of the computerized library catalogue.

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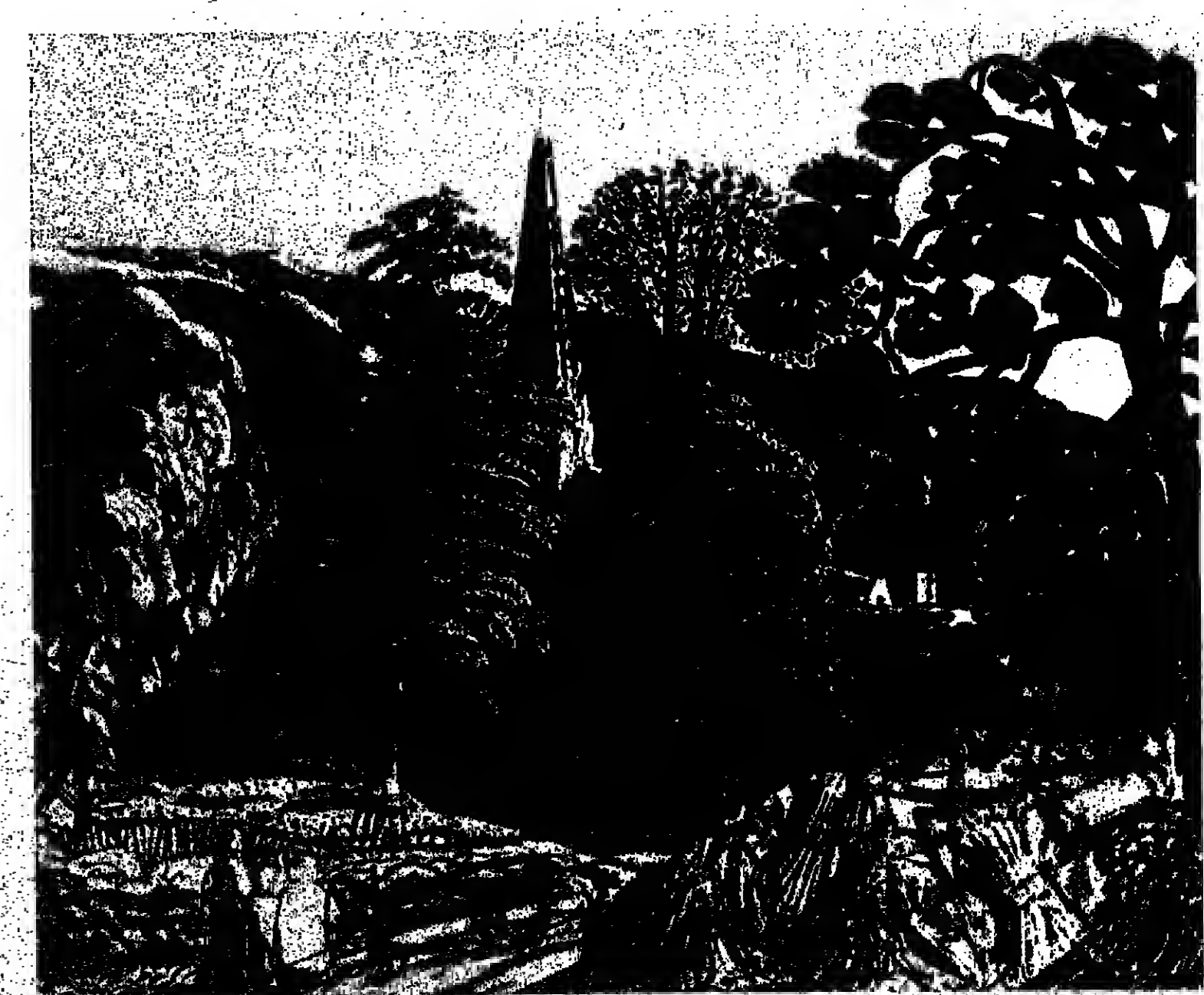
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Samuel Palmer's 'Evening: A church among trees', (shown with a point of brush on card, c. 1830) is on show until December 16 at the Fitzwilliam Museum in the exhibition *Samuel Palmer and The Ancients*: the catalogue by Raymond Lister is published by Cambridge University Press (99pp, with 149 black-and-white plates, £25, paperback £8.95, 0 521 26126 0).

Biographers and historians

Arnaldo Momigliano

RONALD SYME
Roman Papers III
pp 863-1558. Oxford: Clarendon Press. £40.
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Historia Augusta Papers
Edited by A. R. Birley
238pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press. £17.50.
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It is superfluous to say that the third volume of Sir Ronald Syme's *Roman Papers* (including papers published during 1971-81) and the *Historia Augusta Papers* are treasure-houses for anyone who cares about the ancient Romans. To indicate the variety of the arguments they contain it will be enough to quote the titles of three consecutive chapters of the *Roman Papers*: 'Salust's wife', 'Mendacity in Velleius', 'Donatus and the like', the last being an investigation of African nomenclature which incidentally includes curious remarks about the forgery of inscriptions in Umbria. A. R. Birley has added to *Roman Papers III* an index of Ancient Personal Names for all three volumes of the *Roman Papers*: this is an inestimable tool for research.

The relation between biography and history is the central interest of Syme's lifelong study of Roman history - or, rather, of history altogether. Unlike other prosopographers, who are mainly concerned with collecting biographical data for social history, he has always emphasized the historiographical problems posed by the co-existence of history and biography. Hence his various works on Tacitus, Sallust and the *Historia Augusta*. In *Roman Papers III* two essays are specifically devoted to Plutarch and Suetonius ('Biographers of the Caesars', 'The Travels of Suetonius Tranquillus'), while a third makes explicit his favourite dilemma even in its title: 'History or Biography, the case of Tiberius Caesar'. The papers on Plutarch and Suetonius try to establish more precise dates for the careers of the two writers and consequently for the composition of their biographies of Roman emperors. The results may not command general assent, but these essays as a whole show how conscious the two ancient biographers were of their problematic relations with the historians. I therefore take them as my point of departure for some further considerations on the same topic. Holding the same interest in the relations be-

tween history and biography as he does, I still feel that Sir Ronald's interpretation of the *Historia Augusta* (a work which purports to be a fourth-century imitation of Suetonius' *Caesars*) leaves something unaccounted for.

We are still struggling to sort out the implications of a distinction which the Greeks introduced into their accounts of the past by separating history from biography. If history takes care of collective events, such as wars and revolutions, whereas biography tries to give unity and sense to what an individual does or suffers from birth to death, this is the Greek heritage, not a law of nature. To those who, like myself, find this distinction both useful and troublesome the only consolation I have to offer is that it troubled its Greek inventors and their direct Roman disciples. Biographies of kings and of political leaders are of course the most obviously unsatisfactory. Xenophon already tried hard to separate the life of King Agesilaos from the part he played in the Greek history of his time. Xenophon's younger contemporary, Theopompus, did his best to make his Philippic history look different from a biography of King Philip of Macedon. As long as there were enough kings and politicians about to set against each other, it was perhaps not too arduous to separate the study of each of them from the study of the conflicts in which they were collectively involved. The story of the struggle between Demosthenes against Philip was recognizably different from the biography either of Demosthenes or of Philip.

But by the time Rome seemed to have become a world state, and one emperor seemed to control that state, keeping the distinction between history and biography proved to be more arduous. True enough, there were the Parthians, and their kings, outside the Empire; and there were of course plenty of other 'barbarian' leaders to annoy the Romans. But somehow Parthian kings and their generals (unlike Achaemenid kings and generals) and German leaders, even Arminius, were not considered appropriate subjects for a biography. At the beginning of the second century AD any attempt to separate Roman history from the biography of the individual Roman emperors might well have seemed hopeless. Plutarch produced a series of biographies of Roman emperors from Augustus to Vitellius outside his series of parallel biographies. In the life of Galba - one of two surviving in this series - he explicitly refers to his problem of maintaining the distance from 'pragmatic' history. But to judge from these two samples he was not very

successful: he gives little more than a chronicle of the political events for which the individual emperor was responsible.

It was Suetonius, rather than Plutarch, who saved imperial biography from confusion with imperial history. A younger contemporary of Plutarch, and a friend of the Younger Pliny, who was a friend of Tacitus, Suetonius was undoubtedly acquainted with the *Historiae* (and perhaps with the *Annales*) of Tacitus when he embarked on the composition of his *Twelve Caesars*. He gave his biographies a shape which makes it clear to modern as well as to ancient and medieval readers that he was writing biography and not history. How he succeeded is less easy to explain, chiefly because he seems to have subtly modified his scheme after writing about Caesar and Augustus. In these two biographies (the first of which can be usefully compared with the life of Caesar in Plutarch's series of parallel lives) he emphasizes the distinction between the public and the private life of his two heroes. In the lives of later emperors - notably those of Tiberius, Gaius, Nero and Domitian - the emphasis is on the contrast between the respectable and the less respectable aspects (or stages) of their lives. In the biographies of Claudius, Vespasian and Titus the black-and-white technique is replaced by a gradation of colours which makes these lives the best, if I am not mistaken. In any case Suetonius created a type of biography which was suitable for the characterization of isolated sovereigns and kept it recognizably distinct from royal chronicles and histories. Before becoming a model for medieval and modern biographers Suetonius was a model to later Roman biographers of emperors.

The *Historia Augusta*, which professes to be written by six authors under the emperors Diocletian and Constantine, is obviously and explicitly modelled on Suetonius. In the life of Probus its writer (allegedly Flavius Vopiscus of Syracuse) accepts the distinction between biography and history and includes Suetonius Tranquillus among the biographers who have written 'not so much with eloquence as with truthfulness'. In the lives of Maximus and Balbinus (allegedly written by Julius Capitolinus) Suetonius is one of the model biographers. But the Suetonian model could function only on two conditions. First, the writer had to obtain sufficient details about the personal circumstances and character of an emperor to fill the Suetonian scheme. Suetonius himself had used previous biographies, letters, and anecdotal traditions (transmitted either orally or in writ-

ing). An imperial secretary, though perhaps dismissed by Hadrian before he finished his *Twelve Caesars*, Suetonius had been in an ideal position to gather such evidence: part of it belonged in any case to living memory. Second, the writer had to assume an attitude towards imperial power which was singularly devoid of sophistication. A good emperor was to Suetonius just a good man, that is, a victorious general, a competent administrator and a fair judge. No institutional or religious justification was required, though individual emperors could claim divine signs in their favour. It never occurred to Suetonius to explain why and how a man like Vespasian became an emperor and was succeeded by his two sons as emperors - except in the elementary sense that the military career offered what we might call the natural avenue to supreme power.

The *Historia Augusta* had difficulties in following the Suetonian model on both counts. While it used some reliable and fairly abundant sources for the main biographies of the second and early third centuries (roughly from Hadrian to Caracalla), it was unable or unwilling to find adequate facts for the minor biographies of this period (an aspect to which I shall return) and for the biographies from Gaius to Carus, Carinus and Numerianus. After Caracalla there is an increasing amount of sheer invention, which includes not only facts, but sources for alleged facts. Not surprisingly, this is also the section of the *Historia* in which ideological statements or episodes are more explicit and plentiful, of a type unknown to Suetonius. But the Suetonian scheme is disrupted even more by the preoccupation with pretenders, rebels and junior partners in power which inspires the so-called secondary lives. Indeed in the lives of Firmus, Saturninus, Proculus and Bonosus the writer self-consciously dissociates himself from Suetonius (and from Marcellus Maximus) by his interest in 'petty tyrants'. The secondary lives ultimately introduce a historical appreciation which transcends the figures of the individual emperors and involves provincial and sectional situations, not to speak of borderline chieftains, such as Queen Zenobia. The combined effect of all these minor lives, with their excursions and asides (for instance on Gaul and Egypt in *Firmus* 7-8), is to break the biographical scheme and to tend towards general history. No wonder that one of the last lives, that of Carus, begins with an excursus about Roman history in general. What is perhaps even more characteristic is that *Historia*

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Scenes of disorder

Roland Oliver

CHINUA ACHEBE
The Trouble with Nigeria
68pp. Heinemann. £1.95.
0435 906984

In preparation for the federal elections of December 1983, Nigeria's leading novelist Chinua Achebe addressed his countrymen in a political pamphlet, presumably in aid of the campaign of the People's Redemption Party of which he was the deputy national president. The elections were duly held, but failed to produce any change in the political leadership. They were followed in less than a month by a military coup, of which the leaders would seem to share a good many of Achebe's opinions. For the time being, however, they have also put an end both to political parties and to political discussion in Nigeria.

Such is Achebe's skill and grace as a writer of English that even this domestic *pièce d'occasion* will command a world-wide circulation. It will be widely quoted, and not least for its frank speaking, which will be taken by many to apply to Black Africa as a whole. For example, Achebe assures his compatriots that

Nigeria is not a great country. It is one of the most disorderly nations in the world. It is one of the most corrupt, insensitive, inefficient places under the sun. It is one of the most expensive countries and one of those that give least value for money. It is dirty, callous, noisy, ostentatious, dishonest and vulgar.

To anyone who would ask, why, with these views, he still chooses to live there, he replies:

The answer is simple. Nigeria is where God in his infinite wisdom chose to plant me. Therefore I don't consider that I have any right to seek out a more comfortable corner of the world which someone else's intelligence and labour have tidied up. I know enough history to realise that civilisation does not fall down from the sky; it has always been the result of people's toil and sweat, the fruit of their long search for order and justice under brave and enlightened leaders.

Coming to grips with the argument, one's attention is drawn to the fact that Achebe is not what they are only because their leaders are not what they should be. "It may be sound electioneering technique to suggest that there is nothing wrong with the man in the street, and that all he needs to do is to choose a better lot of leaders. But as political thought it is scarcely satisfying. Like so many other attractively forthright assertions in this short book, it could in fact be written the other way round without any demonstrable loss of veracity: Nigerian leaders are what they are only because the Nigerian people have not yet learnt to insist on something better."

Take the issue of corruption, on which Achebe has much to say, but all of it suggesting a poison which has entered Nigeria through its Westernized élite and has spread downwards through society from there. He writes of

The countless billions that a generous Providence poured into our national coffers in the last ten years... stolen and looted away by people in power... squandered in uncontrolled importation of all kinds of useless merchandise... embedded through inflated contracts to an increasing army of political loyalists... consumed in the escalating salaries of a grossly overstaffed and unproductive public service.

The suggested remedy is that the man at the top should rid himself of his corrupt followers, and all will be well.

But is this a correct analysis? The corruptions of the small man offer less scope for purple prose, but, for example, the last time I was in Nigeria I was told on good authority that the manual workers employed on a building site would pay a substantial percentage of their small earnings to the foreman, to retain his goodwill. Do they do so because the foreman pays a similar percentage to the contractor, and the contractor to the official or politician who awards the contract? Or do they do it because Nigerian custom, unmodified in practice by modern legislation, still takes it for granted that at any level of society a patron needs to be rewarded with a gift? If the former, something may be achieved by punishing the official or politician; if the latter, the law will probably remain inoperative until public opinion catches up with it. Cases will just not be brought into court.

Again, in relation to tribalism Achebe writes as if this was an evil conjured up by the wicked leaders, especially those having Yoruba for a mother tongue. Tribalism he defines as, "discrimination against a citizen because of his place of birth". Actually, it is nothing of the kind. It is discrimination in favour of those who speak the same language as oneself. The first definition suggests an aberration, akin to anti-semitism. The second is the most natural thing in the world. Which of us does not find it easier — much easier — to trust someone who speaks our own language than someone with whom we have to communicate through a lingua franca like French or Hausa? And yet this is the problem *par excellence* of all but about six states in Black Africa. Every independence leader recognized it and tried to deal with it by a conspiracy of silence. For so long as the forces of law and order remained in expatriate hands, the conspiracy worked. Then came the pressures from below. The key security posts had to be nationalized, and the politicians had to face the fact that they really trusted only those who were ethnically and linguistically the closest to themselves. Certainly, tribalism has not spread downwards from the top. It has seeped upwards from the bottom and forced recognition at the national level. That is not to say that it is getting worse. The tribes are being educated together, at least at the secondary and tertiary level. They are being employed together in both the public and the private sectors. Slowly the concept of a nation is growing. But there are many perils years ahead, which will not be shortened by leaders who try to move too far ahead of public opinion.



Then, there is what Achebe calls the cult of mediocrity, "picking the third and fourth eleven to play for us", on which he blames the power and water cuts experienced by Nigeria's cities, the overloaded telephone system and the motor traffic reduced to hooting helplessness. He even asserts that such inconveniences do not afflict him when he stays at the best hotel in Ouagadougou. Here he is being almost petulantly unfair to his compatriots, for the discomfort attendant on rapid urbanization are a measure of Nigeria's lead over Upper Volta, recently renamed Burkina Faso. If there is a certain under-performance in the professional class in Nigeria, as in other African countries which have only been independent for a generation or so, it is due, I believe, to the persistence of certain very deep-seated African social customs. First, African tradition is gerontocratic. It is much more difficult than in Europe for a younger person to be promoted over one senior in age and experience, and incompetent garrulity, though no more prevalent than elsewhere, may still be treated with more obsequious loyalty. Second, work that must be done alone is far more liable to interruption. Homes are full of women and children. Offices are beset by callers, and tradition still insists that callers must be politely received, and not hurried off the premises, even if their business is of a purely private nature. Worldly success carries the obligation to be patient and kind and generous and above all affable. Western countries are described with disapproval as places where a man cannot even call on his own brother without an appointment.

ment. African courtesy is certainly the thief of time, but it is not well described as a cult of mediocrity.

Achebe's hero among African politicians is Julius Nyerere. Ostensibly this relates to the Tanzanian leader's undisputed freedom from any stain of financial corruption, and to his insistence that cabinet members and party leaders must be clear of business entanglements. In these matters Tanzanians seem to him "to walk around six feet tall". The other side of the coin is of course the very tightly controlled nature of the Tanzanian economy, and the preparedness of the party to enforce the most uneconomic changes in the traditional patterns of land settlement and land tenure in the interests of socialist theory. One is given to suspect that a Nigeria governed by Achebe would be much more tightly controlled than the present one, and probably much less productive in consequence.

Nowhere does Achebe show a flicker of recognition that what is really wrong with Nigeria, as with nearly every other country of post-colonial Africa, is that systems of government are so organized as to discourage the farmer

Sharing the spoils

Martin Lynn

J.D.Y. PEEL
Ishesha and Nigerians: The Incorporation of a Yoruba Kingdom 1890s-1970s
346pp. Cambridge University Press. £27.50.
0521 225450

J.D.Y. Peel's *Ishesha and Nigerians* is one of the most important books to have appeared on Africa and the colonial period in recent years.

Ishesha, the Yoruba kingdom that is the subject of Professor Peel's study, was at the forefront of social change in colonial Nigeria. Peel's theme, however, is that while colonial rule had a considerable impact on Ishesha, what is remarkable is the way in which the basic framework of Ishesha politics and society survived. This central framework was not the "class" struggle between rulers and ruled so beloved of Marxists, nor the competition between lineages favoured by anthropologists. Rather, it was the immensely complicated but flexible network of patronage that, by the nineteenth century, had coalesced around the Ishesha chieftaincy system, with a reciprocal transfer of spoils and resources up and down the network of offices existing between chiefs and the quarters they ruled. This system, argues Peel, survived the British takeover during the 1890s, by shifting its control over the spoils of war and trade to the new spoils of the colonial Native Authority network.

Colonial rule, however, still posed fundamental problems. The spread of cocoa farming and new trading opportunities, the introduction of Western education, the growth of Christianity and the increase in labour migration, underpinned a wide-ranging transformation of Ishesha society. Not least, the new economic opportunities enabled young men to marry earlier and thereby break away from control by their elders, as well as bringing about the emergence of a new élite of traders, initially dependent on European firms but soon able to strike out on their own. Accompanying this was the spread of new social values, with "enlightenment" and "improvement" becoming the watchwords.

It is Peel's thesis that the traditional political and social structure of Ishesha in fact proved remarkably able to absorb these new pressures. Those who benefited from these opportunities — the traders for instance — did so because of their chiefly links and their "social credit" within the existing social structure of Ishesha. More importantly, their success led them to attempt to climb the existing chieftaincy and patronage system of the town, a process deliberately encouraged on the other side by Owa (Kings) Arimolaran (1920-42) in his creation of an alliance between old and new élites.

However, this incorporation of the new forces in society was not without its difficulties. Absorption into the existing establishment was not fast enough for all. The Ishesha riots of January 1941 ostensibly resulted from opposition to chiefly corruption but in reality repre-

sented a communal, even populist, attempt to widen the patronage network. Thus the riot far from marking the disintegration of the traditional social and political structure in Ishesha, were evidence of its continuing vitality, with the junior chiefs, many of them educated and traders, benefiting most from the changes that followed. Thereafter it was the educated who were increasingly to play the central role in politics, either as chiefs themselves or as advisers to chiefs. The eventual success of nationalist parties in Ishesha, ignored until they began to align themselves with the existing Ishesha political structure, was part of the "politics of improvement" that this new élite represented. By the mid-50s, the educated take-over of the absorption within, the Ishesha political system was virtually complete.

All this is useful enough. Rarely can the history of an African community under colonial rule have been examined in such depth. Yet it is less the empirical dimension of *Ishesha and Nigerians* that gives it its importance than its theoretical thrust. Like an increasing number of Africanists, Peel expresses dissatisfaction with the "dependency theory" orthodoxy that has, to a large extent, dominated African studies over the past twenty years. As Peel points out, "dependency theory", with its stress on external, global, factors as the determinants of African social change has failed to take into account the immense variety of the African situation and, more importantly, the independent internal dynamics of African society. Similarly, says Peel, the emphasis of the so-called "London School of History", with its focus on national identity and the emergence of a national élite, has failed to provide a satisfying intellectual alternative.

Peel argues that, instead of the global structures and constraints of the dependency theorists, the starting-point of study has to be the discrete local community with its own internal dynamics. Here the basis of analysis cannot be the economic reductionism of Marxism with its stress on classes which do not exist in Africa. Rather, Peel argues for a view of society that takes into account the autonomy of politics, ideology and social values. It is only by accepting what he terms "the primacy of politics" and within politics the autonomous role of communal identities and interest groups that agents of social change, that events can be properly understood. The past is not, as some would argue, a "mythic charter" justifying present relationships, but a continuing and relevant entity in peoples' consciousness and in present politics. Events are the products of historical processes; more specifically they are the result of the intersection of communal identities and interest groups with personal identities and interest groups within existing political structures. Hence, Peel's stress on the importance of what he terms "the Past in the Present" — of the continued relevance of traditional institutions — is a complex but ultimately persuasive argument which, despite the book's somewhat abstract style, should make an impact throughout the field of African studies and beyond.

Fighting for the poor

Alan Angell

PHILIP BERRYMAN
The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American revolutions
452pp. SCM. £12.50.
0334 00260
KENNETH N. MEDHURST
The Church and Labour in Colombia
233pp. Manchester University Press. £25.
07190 09693

Philip Berryman tries to do too much in one book. In 400 closely printed pages, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion* contains a description of political conflict in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, outlines recent changes in the Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council and discusses the way in which the Churches of Central America have tried to adapt to the violence which has so disfigured the countries of that area. And finally, it considers the ethical dilemmas of Christians faced with the challenge of revolution in Nicaragua, and civil war in El Salvador. In practice, however, "Christians" become "Catholics", for there is disappointingly little about the Protestant churches which have, for example, made so much progress in Guatemala.

The author brings interesting personal experience to bear on the subject. A former Catholic priest who worked for many years in Panama, he is now a Quaker, influenced by Marxism and extremely critical of the Catholic hierarchy. Central American bishops, with a few exceptions, get rough treatment. We are told that the bishops "as a group tend to reflect their own class perceptions rather than those of the majority in the church, who are the poor".

There is much that is of interest in the book, which will be read with profit by anyone concerned with the fate of the suffering countries in this area, or with the way in which Christians should respond to problems of violence, and suffering, and the abuse of state power — problems posed with an intensity reminiscent of the

era of fascism in Europe. At the most basic level, the book contains a great deal of information and a wealth of detail about local church groups such as the *comunidades de base* in Central America. It also provides a fascinating set of case-studies of the ways in which the Church responds to stark political choices.

And yet there are reasons for feeling some disquiet with Berryman's interpretation and reasoning. His overall pattern of analysis is excessively dualist. Societies are divided into the good (the peasantry, revolutionaries, most lower-level clergy) and the bad (the oligarchs, the military, most bishops and the US). The urban working class gets rather left out of this account; and the poor old middle class is only to be given "some" pastoral attention, to "avoid making the church a refuge of the disgruntled bourgeoisie, and the source of ideological ammunition for their attack on the revolution". In this account the Salvadorean Christian Democrats become a "hollow shell" — a verdict which diminishes the importance of a political tendency which is not irrelevant, though neither obviously left nor right, and is certainly representative of social groups which are neither oligarchs nor peasants.

The question of the attitude of the Church to violence is fundamental in Central America, and is discussed at great length. But does Berryman adopt double standards? At times he comes very close to doing so. His admiration for Camilo Torres's aim of making the Colombian Church more progressive will be shared by many, but does it follow that one also has to admire Torres's acceptance of, and involvement in, armed struggle? My own view is that such action simply prolonged and added to violence in a society which has seen far too much of it, and where the rather fragile democratic process needed support and strengthening, not attack. More relevant to Berryman's account is the murder of the Salvadorean guerrilla leader, Roque Dalton, by other guerrillas on charges of political betrayal (which we now know to be false). Berryman's account is sim-

ply evasive. He writes, very lamely, that "when they join guerrilla organizations people do accept the need for a high degree of discipline (including the extreme sanction of 'trial' and 'execution') as a necessary condition of revolutionary action". But they do not also accept injustice. Berryman tends to adopt a double standard towards violence of the right (which brutalizes and is indiscriminate) and of the left (which is selective — and ennobles?). Thus we read, "I would assert that people who had not actively opposed the violence of the powerful against the poor, at some cost to themselves, have no moral authority to question the violence used by the poor". No one would question that the only way Somoza could be overthrown was by armed insurrection, and few would doubt (Mrs Kirkpatrick apart) that the resulting society is a vast improvement on the previous régime. But violence does have terrible and destructive costs even if used in a just cause. And if it is used unjustly, even for a just cause, then it should be condemned whoever is responsible for it.

There is a tangled attempt to argue that democracy does not necessarily imply the holding of elections. This is justified by reference to the Greek roots of the word. But Nicaragua and El Salvador are not Greek city states, and if there is a better way of expressing democracy other than through free and competitive elections, no one has yet demonstrated it. Of course, it may well have been necessary to postpone elections in Nicaragua, and to limit free political expression because of pressures from the *comas* and the US (we did so in Britain when engaged in war), but that doesn't mean that Nicaragua has discovered a more perfect way of democracy. It simply means that countries under siege, can, and do, quite properly have other priorities.

It is a pity that Berryman spends so much time examining the right, for it would have been much more interesting to have learnt something about life in the guerrilla zones of El Salvador, for example. The account of strife-

torn Guatemala is, however, both vivid and very moving. But perhaps the best part of the book is the account of the political and religious development of Archbishop Romero. Here at least is one leading priest who fulfils Berryman's vision of a progressive clergyman — yet one who did not oversimplify.

The Church that Kenneth Medhurst writes about is very different from that of Nicaragua or El Salvador. Camilo Torres apart, the Colombian Church has had a keen sense of hierarchy, of traditional values and of the supreme need for institutional self-preservation. It has been unable to maintain its earlier unity in the face of social and economic changes, of increasing secularization and growing political and class conflict, though it is less divided than most Churches in Latin America. The response of the Church to these changes, and the internal divisions they produced, are well illustrated in its relationship with the labour movement. Few labour movements in Latin America have had such close relations with the Church, and Medhurst brings out very well the advantages and disadvantages of that relationship.

Medhurst writes in a more sober, modest and academic vein than Berryman, but he is dealing with problems as crucial to the Church's survival as those of the response to violence in Central America — even if they are less dramatic. But attempting to shape a labour movement simply as a bulwark against communism and liberalism, and as no real threat to the status quo, runs against the facts of industrial life. The major labour confederation in Colombia, the UTC, became less Catholic and more political, less passive and more militant, less identified with its vision of the needs of the Church and more with those of labour. The Church may no longer control the labour movement in Colombia, but it has been a profound influence on its development. There is little doubt that the relationship has been of benefit to the Church — whether it has been so to labour is another question.

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Life with the Tudors

Valerie Pearl

JOYCE YOUNGS
Sixteenth-Century England
444pp. Allon Lane. £14.95 (paperback, £2.95).
07139 1243 X

Sixteenth-Century England is a most readable and welcome addition to a series which has already made its mark. The Pelican Social History of Britain. Since the mid-1970s there has been a great output of work on different themes of economic and social life under the Tudors. Urban and regional histories, occupational and industrial researches, investigations of land use and the state of agriculture, examinations of the role of the clergy and the place of the Church, scrutinies of trade and taxation, "reconstitutions" of population and analyses of birth and death-rates, diagnoses of morbid disease, arguments about poverty, crime and disorder, probes into family life, accounts of educational reform and estimates of literacy, measurements of the standard of living and enquiries into the cause and effects of the great surges in population and prices—all have been widely, but usually separately, debated by historians and, to some extent and not always convincingly, subjected to quantification, sociological theory and even psychological analysis. But there have been very few works which attempted to bring together the results of such studies to give us an overall picture of Tudor society—an up-to-date synthesis of research on how men and women conducted themselves in the family, in their communities, their places of work and leisure and in their acts of worship, how in all classes great political and economic events and changes affected their everyday experiences and, in the words of J.H. Plumb, general editor of the series, "why their lives, their beliefs, their activities were what they were".

It cannot be said that all these "hows" and "whys" are fully integrated in Joyce Youngs's

work. Some issues are still the subject of controversy and many still largely unexplored. Nevertheless, despite some weaknesses in the treatment of the social history of the period and its heavy stress on economic aspects (a reflection of recent published research?), the book is much more than just a useful summing-up of the state of knowledge. Professor Youngs over-modestly claims it as being "based largely on other people's research", but the result is a judicious survey based on wide and up-to-date reading with the author's own interpretations and critical views also being presented to the reader, such as her cautious scepticism about precise statistics for England's population for each year from 1541 ("based on the registers of just over four hundred out of some ten thousand parishes") and her emphasis on the continuity of the social life of the English, described as having "carried over from the medieval to the early modern world not only their identity as a people but a considerable part of their community life and institutions". It is indeed in relating Tudor society to its medieval background that Youngs makes one of her most valuable and original contributions.

In the organization of her book too she strikes an original note which, if not so "idiosyncratic" as she herself describes it, is unusual in giving a semi-thematic treatment within a rough chronology. The method succeeds in its declared aim of conveying "an impression of time" within a single century. The first five chapters, dealing mainly with the period up to the 1530s prior to the Henrician Reformation, are concerned variously with occupations, landlords and tenants, town-dwellers, internal migration and networks of affinity, rural and urban society, and rank and status. Next follows a group of chapters which deal largely with developments in mid-century: in two of them the phenomenal increases in both population and prices are authoritatively handled, as also is the development of the land market, a subject in which the author is an

acknowledged expert. In two more chapters the changes in religion are linked to an account of the clergy and of schooling, and are followed by a wide survey of sixteenth-century disorder, which includes rebellion, crime and litigation.

The remaining six chapters, roughly one-third of the book, cover in the main the reign of Elizabeth. They begin with some consideration of new occupational horizons, an introduction which provides a background to sections on poverty and social relief, the wealth and standing of different classes of society, marriage, the household and the family, and an evocative account of rural and small-town community life which may surprise those who see only increasingly oligarchic rule in the countryside and in country towns, ignoring such pointers as the development of parish councils and wards, sometimes annually elected, and the growth of measures of amelioration and self-government. In Bury St Edmunds, for example, the leading householders, even before the town was an incorporated borough, drew up by-laws for social legislation and community regulation. Youngs gives a vivid account of the tendency for towns to acquire the patronage of nearby parishes and to appoint lecturers—a remarkable advance in lay and civic influence and surely food for thought for those who find evidence only for the decay of towns in the sixteenth century. In fact, the author could have made more of self-regulation and municipal enterprise under the Tudors.

In such a wide-ranging survey there are inevitably topics which are undervalued or neglected. One of the most important is the literary, artistic and intellectual side of life, an omission which Youngs thinks may be excused because it was largely the culture of an élite. To include it would, she says, have necessitated also the treatment of popular culture, and that could not be done, it is claimed, because the culture of the great majority was "mainly oral

and functional". Moreover, "so little is known about it" that its inclusion "would have been to introduce an imbalance which is contrary to the purpose of the book". It seems a pity that these difficulties deterred her. Popular culture is the widest sense, including the *mentality* of a people and the way they occupied their leisure, is not the *terra incognita* here suggested.

There are a few minor misprints or misinterpretations which should be corrected in a second edition: blast furnaces produced cast-iron not iron ore (p239); aliens were nationalized not nationalized (p127); there were nothing like as many as 150 guilds in London (p64)—a common mistake, probably derived from a fifteenth-century list of "trades" much cited later; and there is some confusion about the numbers and proportions of aliens to which males in London for 1500 when 3,000 aliens are cited (p128), a ratio of one in ten it is said (which would produce an impossibly high number of natives for that date), and for 1540 when the ratio is said to be one in three. Hard statistics for both strangers and the native populations of the metropolis are notoriously unreliable, as Youngs recognizes in another context. The best available figures (which tell a very incomplete story) suggest that the proportion of aliens to adult males in London peaked at about one in six and fell off as the proportion throughout the century as the native population rapidly increased. None the less, the author makes a valid point in showing how large numbers of aliens were rapidly absorbed in London.

In general, the thoroughness of Professor Youngs's reading is evident throughout the book. A discursive bibliography adds to its usefulness and its up-to-dateness is aptly demonstrated by the inclusion of David Pallister's *The Age of Elizabeth*, published only last year, in many ways a complementary work to the present volume.

In Seisdon Hundred

Rosalie Mander

M.W. GREENSLADE (Editor)
A History of the County of Stafford:
Volume XX
250pp. Oxford University Press. £60.
019 7272651

This twentieth volume on Staffordshire in the Victoria History of the Counties of England deals with Seisdon Hundred (Part), comprising the south-west of the county with the additions of Tettenthall and Ambecote (Worcestershire). It would have been helpful if the map (circa 1850) had been given lines of demarcation to indicate which parts of it qualify for inclusion in the text. For instance, two properties of outstanding historical interest, Mosely Old Hall (Bushbury), where Charles II hid after the battle of Worcester, and Holbeach House (Himley), centre of the Gunpowder Plot, do not come in. Somewhere it should be stated whether they have already appeared in a previous volume or are due later.

It should also be stated what are the date limits: the present arrangement seems entirely arbitrary. The "Social and Cultural Activities" of Bilbrook cease with "well-dressing on Maundy Thursday in the latter 17th century", but the present heir to The Wombourne Woodhouse here supplies information as recently as 1983 about the property of which Povsky in 1974 could observe that "it is an interesting house of which one would like to know more". The major estates of Wrottesley and Patshull are fully covered: Wrottesley surely holding a record for transference from rural to borough Councils, to finish up taken out of Staffordshire and put into the bureaucratically begotten county of West Midlands. The boundaries of the Stamford estates in Enville and Kinver can be tracked down under the names of various members of the Grey family, a process not made easier by the cross-reference system of the index.

With regard to errors concerning Wightwick Manor (Tettenthall)—now National Trust—I must declare my interest as I still live there. The land on which it was built in 1887 by Theodore Mander was bought from the Foley family, who they owned, but did not live at, the old

Wightwick Manor (built c.1662), at that time known as Manor Farm with stables and cowsheds in use. Contrary to what is stated here, the property never had anything to do with Wightwick Hall, built in 1895 on the parish hill and having no connection with the Wightwick family and its title to Lordship of the Manor of Tettenthall Regia (1086). Richard Wightwick, co-founder of Penkhridge College, Oxford (1623), should be included among county worthies.

The present volume maintains a high standard of clear type, notes on the page and documentation of early sources, but the series as a whole is still addressed to antiquarians by antiquaries and is of little service to a new generation of students to whom it is recommended by their tutors as a prime source for the projects which are the staple of post-war educational method. They find it confusing in arrangement and unhelpful in approach. (They would get on better with Shaw's 1801 *History and Antiquities* in which dead bones live.) Could there not be some concessions to those without immediate access to shelves of dictionaries, encyclopaedias and the DNB, such as a glossary and translation of archaic terms; of hides into hectares for a start? Other information could be more conveniently given in tabulated form, such as lists of parliamentary constituencies with their members and dates, perhaps incumbents of parishes and, in some cases, genealogies to make clearer the changes of name and title in family owners of estates.

There are also anachronisms. After the position on Churches in each area come the headings "Roman Catholicism" and "Protestant Nonconformity", but no recognition of the growing number of practising non-Christians, though it is temples that are being built while churches become redundant. In a related connection there is nothing about the changes of ethnic life-style resulting from movements of population into these old Hundreds from the tricks like Whitmore Reas in Wolverhampton. Here are the new "well-dressings" in the VCH is to maintain, let alone increase, the responsibilities as a work of reference it may take greater note of contemporary conditions that are the data of the future, and also make its presentation more user-friendly.

Grass and the graduate

A. W. B. Simpson

DAVID LEIGH
High Time: The shocking life and times of
Howard Marks
288pp. Heinemann. £9.95.
0434 41339 9

Some years ago anxieties were expressed in official circles lest more graduates should be going into crime than joining the constabulary, and this racy essay in investigative journalism tells the story of a group of such graduates and their curious friends and acquaintances. Drug peddling was rife in Oxford in the 1960s and the university reacted to the problems of the time by dismantling its unpopular disciplinary system and letting the barbarians swarm over the frontiers with relative impunity. The central figure whose activities are chronicled in this book is Howard Marks, a product of what had by then become of Jowett's Balliol. Eventually, through a piece of adroitly conducted plea bargaining, he was to serve only a modest sentence of imprisonment. Even outside the ranks of the cognoscenti his name will be familiar since he became nationally known in 1973,

when he jumped bail, the press retailing alarming rumours of links with the Mafia, the IRA Provisionals and the Secret Service. His appearance led to a sensational trial, partly conducted in camera, at the end of which the jury acquitted him; his sentence was contracted for a different offence. Also prominently featured is an associate of Marks, Graham Plinston (St Edmund Hall), present name and abode not known.

Supporting roles are played by an extraordinary list of individuals, most, it perhaps needs to be said, of unimpeachable integrity. There is the improbably but accurately named Francis Leader McCarthy Willis-Bund, one time Dean of Balliol, a man with many crosses to bear; intellectuals such as Christopher Hill; stern upholders of law and order such as Senior Proctor David Yardley and the indefatigable Inspector Strutt of the drugs squad; comic figures such as Melford Stevenson, in whose court Stephen Balogh once released laughing gas, so awful was the tedium; Yoko Ono; John Lennon. . . . The book reads at times like a gossip column in some coterie magazine. Also appearing are some very unpleasant people indeed, for the world of the drug dealer is not a charming one. Leigh does not and cannot re-

veal his sources for the story, which we have to take on trust, though there is no reason to doubt his claim that no facts have been invented, and that all the people who figure in the book, some under altered names, are real. It is of course in the nature of the trade that an investigative journalist cannot tell all he knows, and no doubt the jolly air of the story owes something to reticence over the less pleasant aspects of the effects of drug dealing on the consumer. Many of the conversations have of necessity been, as Leigh puts it, reconstructed—more simply, invented. It may be right that they seem to reflect the inanity both of the times and those involved, as in this exchange between two Balliol men:

"Well, what would you do about society if it was you in charge?"
"Smash it!"
"Good Lord, I'm really surprised to hear you say that. Think what it would mean to your parents if the Communists took over here."

In general Leigh is content to tell his story of the robbers running rings around the cops without delving into possible explanations for the phenomena described, and he explicitly denies any wish to tell his tale from the viewpoint either of amateur moralist or policeman. Occasionally he theorizes—we are told for example that "The universal outlawing of marijuana has been one of the few more or less permanent triumphs of Western materialism", whatever that means. Inevitably, however, as all writers tend to do, he develops an affection for his subjects; the awful Howard Marks comes to be presented as a romantic figure, as in this lyrical passage describing an incident in his travels when he comes face to face with wild cannibal plants:

It was, he found to his disappointment, a curiously emotionless occasion. He and these plants did not really have much to say to each other. He climbed back into the car, gestured the chauffeur upwards, into the Himalayas. In the hills, he encountered an old dope-dealing Oxford chum—the way that Balliol

US super-carrier

E.S. Turner

J.F. FEDERSPIEL
The Ballad of Typhoid Mary
Translated by Joel Agee
172pp. André Deutsch. £6.95.
0239 77066

"Typhoid Mary", otherwise Mary Mallon, was the most notorious, though not necessarily the most destructive, typhoid carrier in American annals. As a peripatetic cook, determined to practise her skills, she had exceptional opportunities to confer death on her contemporaries and she led the authorities a gruelling chase. She was the inspiration of Sunday supplements and the *New Yorker* profiled her during her lifetime. A famous caricature (reproduced on the jacket of this book) shows her tossing human skulls into a frying-pan.

Mary was discovered and nicknamed by a resourceful public health officer, Dr George A. Soper, who picked up her trail while investigating an epidemic in Ithaca, New York, in 1903. In 1907 she was the cause of another outbreak at Oyster Bay and after an extensive hunt was overpowered in a bruising scrimmage and made a "medical prisoner" in New York.

In 1910, invoking *habeas corpus*, a smart lawyer tried to have Mary put back into general circulation, but failed. However, soon afterwards, the New York Health Department freed her, with a solemn warning to wash her hands more carefully (she was a faecal carrier) and report periodically. Convinced she was harmless, she flouted her instructions and continued to spread the disease. In 1915 she caused a typhoid outbreak in a New York maternity hospital, where she cooked as "Mrs Brown", and was teased by staff who said she must be Typhoid Mary. Another posse of police and health inspectors seized her and carried her off to Riverside Hospital on North Brother Island in the East River. In 1923 she was given a comfortable cottage there and allowed to entertain friends, who did not stay for meals. She even went shopping in Manhattan. The cottage was her home until 1938, when she died. She had ceased to be rebellious and was said to have turned to religion.

Dr Soper wrote about her in the *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* in October, 1939. He respected her as a tough adversary. When he first met her she was about forty, blonde, blue-eyed, heavily-built and with a determined mouth. Not relishing his questions, she came at him with a carving-knife and he left smartly. Later, trying to convince her that she was a death-dealer, and urging her to have her gall-bladder removed, he offered to write her life story, concealing her real name, and give her all the profits. If she would co-operate, but in vain. Reference to his article in the *Bulletin* suggests he could have made a very fair job of it.

Certainly the lady deserved a better chronicle than is forthcoming in J.F. Federspiel's *The Ballad of Typhoid Mary*, presented as "a morbidly witty moral fable" and "the surprise literary hit of Europe in 1982". It is in no sense a ballad and is very largely fiction. "I have made use of what little information I have been able to gather; all the rest of Mary's reality is my own invention", he says; later he repeats that "a certain amount of the truth will have to be invented". So there it is: reality and truth are things to be fabricated.

According to Soper, Mary was probably from Northern Ireland, though she would say nothing about her origins. Federspiel, a Swiss, presents her as a thirteen-year-old immigrant from Switzerland, arriving in New York in 1868 in the plague-stricken *Lebnitz*, a night-mare vessel entirely coated with faeces. Mary's parents and two sisters had died with more than 100 others on the seventy-day voyage.

The narrative is now banded over to a dying paediatrician, Dr Ragoel, whose grandfather is said to have been a colleague of Dr Soper and an authority on Typhoid Mary. Ragoel tells how the waif is smuggled from the ship by a remarkably unfastidious doctor called Dorf-helmer and taken direct to his home. Dorf-helmer is a gloating devotee of *Alice in Wonderland*, a bad sign. Mary does not discourage his advances. Indeed she goes more than half-way to meet him; apparently she was debauched by the ship's cook in between seeing her family thrown overboard. To reward her protector Mary prepares his meals; and serve him right.

From now on her progress through a corrupt Gotham resembles that of one of the drabbs who fall into the hands of lechers in the penny dreadfuls of G. W. M. Reynolds. Picked up by a servant, she is handed over to two elderly voluptuaries, repaying their attentions by killing off the unesteemed wife of one of them. And so on, in the spirit of Federspiel's epigraph—"Life is strange and the world is bad" (Thomas Wolfe). The world is at its worst when Mary, her lethal secret having been rumoured, is hired to nurse a retarded girl whose parents think this is a clever way to shorten her life.

The brief narrative is filled out with quirky philosophizings and lists of famous men who were being born or doing unusual things at the time. Even those who can convince themselves that it is a witty moral fable may find the taste a little rancid. It is as if someone had set out to write a life of the Elephant Man and, finding the facts scarce, had decided to give him a sleazy sex life.

"The world was not very kind to Mary", said Dr Soper. Will she end up like Jack Sheppard or Calamity Jane as a character for whom anyone can devise adventures? Will she perhaps become the heroine of a Broadway musical?

men so often did, even in these late days of Empire. The style owes something, though not a lot, to John Buchan; the Great Game is a new one. Marks is, eventually, all but canonized as "the last public representative of the Spirit of the Sixties".

If this book is a success, as it probably will be, this will reflect the skill with which Mr Leigh has put together a remarkable amount of information about the seedy world of drug dealers, the secret service, and the parasitic professionals, and written it up as a good read—rattling is perhaps the correct adjective. The story is made more acceptable by the fact that cannabism, the drug principally involved, as Leigh presents the story, appears, after monumental expenditure on research, to be less pernicious than once was supposed—more in the category of, say, butter than alcohol. What remains puzzling is the motivation and character of the people involved—were they simply greedy? Or was something more profound involved in the way in which these partly privileged departed from Oxbridge tradition and became thriving entrepreneurs?

It is hard not to connect the tale which is set out here with another which is hardly touched upon—the alarming rise in addition to hard drugs, particularly heroin, over this period, something which cannot be viewed in a light-hearted way, and the dramatic failure of officialdom to control a problem which, twenty-five years ago, simply did not exist. Expressions like "the spirit of the sixties" serve, as it seems to me, to explain little of the mystifying events of that decade. Rather they conceal how little we understand about the social movements of our own times.

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Malcolm Chapman

PAUL JORION
Les Pêcheurs d'Houat: Anthropologie
économique
198pp. Paris: Hermann. 68fr.
270565951 X

Houat is a small island a few miles from the southern coast of Brittany, near the Quiberon peninsula and close to the larger Belle-Ile. Its people number about 400; fishing is the basis of their economy, but tourism is increasingly important. *Les Pêcheurs d'Houat* is an "economic anthropology" of the local fishing industry, and contains many elements of a more general ethnography; it is a pleasant, interesting, well-researched and well-presented book (although it lacks an index, and the photographs are not all very clear). The fieldwork of which it is the result was carried out between 1973 and 1974, and changes since then are not taken into account. The cover note describes this as the "first anthropological study of a community of fishermen". It is not, and Paul Jorion himself makes no such claim.

The fishermen of Houat make their living mostly by fishing crabs, lobster, prawns and

scallops, and a large part of the book is given over to relatively technical and local details of this artisanal occupation. Attention is paid to the role of kinship in boat-ownership and crew-formation, and a useful last chapter deals with broad economic issues (such as the role of the banks in providing capital, the relationship between the pension system and the system by which the proceeds of a boat's catch are shared out, and the tacit methods of regulation of income and work-load).

France is, as Jorion tells us, a country where everything that is not at the centre is on the periphery, and he deals extensively with the economic and technological aspects of this peripheral status. We learn much less, however, about its linguistic or social aspects, which are intimately bound into the "economic" issues. Houat is not the extreme eastern end of the area in which the Breton language is still spoken, and we are told that Breton is still spoken among the old people, and understood by many of the middle-aged. But it enters no further into the ethnography. We have here an ethnography of a French-speaking community, written by a native French speaker.

More serious, perhaps, is the absence of any systematic discussion of the social marginality of Houat. We are offered some fascinating

clues as to how its people view their own moral, social and financial position in relation to the mainland, but that is all. The social detail provides an authentic flavour of life in a small Breton fishing community, but it is scattered through the work, and is sometimes coloured by a rather reflexive anti-clericalism, which goes along, of course, with the sub-Moroccan intuition that the "economy" should be the primary object of ethnographic study. Jorion also omits some relevant information, I think, by assuming in his reader too much background knowledge of French social life — a typical failing in anthropologists describing a culture close to their own.

Tourism is important to Houat, but Jorion disapproves of and to a great extent disregards it because he considers the job of anthropology to be the study of societies that are "peripheral to the dominant system", and tourism is part of that system. Yet Jorion was in Houat in order to look at a geographically peripheral, technologically backward, traditional society. So are the tourists, and they pay good money for the view. So are not the "economy", and the social and moral aspects of peripherality irrevocably bound up together? And does it still make sense for the anthropologist to seek only the "traditional" in the societies he studies?

Cube's roots

George Mikes

ANDRÁS MEZEI
Magyar Kocka
437pp. Budapest: Magvető. 45ft.

The Rubik Cube was one of the most successful and lucrative games ever invented, rivaling Monopoly and Scrabble. People, all over the world, bought more than 100 million Cubes and company directors, agents and pirates became millionaires as a result, yet the original manufacturers of them in Hungary went (practically) bankrupt. How to achieve such an amazing feat? Thereby hangs the cautionary tale related in this book.

The whole thing started on a purely practical level. Ernő Rubik, an engineer, attempted to construct a large cube made from small cubes (in rows of two first, then of three) so that the small cubes could be turned freely in all directions inside the big one — a difficult task which became an obsession. While wrestling with the problem, however, he realized that if the revolving cubes were painted in different colours, the whole thing could be turned into a puzzle. Thus Rubik eventually became the richest man in Hungary: the first true Communist dollar millionaire and an international celebrity.

Rubik first offered the Cube to a Hungarian toy-factory, Polytoys, who delayed replying for nine months. In 1977, however, some Cubes were manufactured but they created very little interest and lay collecting dust on the shelves. In the end the Hungarian mafia (not an official body but a powerful international organization all the same) woke up and began to act. Tibor Lacz, a Hungarian living in Vienna, realized the possibilities of the Cube and alerted another Hungarian, Tom Kremer, living in London, who in turn made a contract with a large American firm under Hungarian control. The Cube had started on its rise to world fame.

Ideal, the American firm, ordered a million of them, an unprecedented order in the annals of Hungarian toy production, and the Hungarians could not cope. Then, somewhat surprisingly, it became evident that the Cube was not protected by patent. Ideal called it the Rubik Cube and tried, at least, to protect the name. Difficulties increased. Hungary could not deliver the required quantity — 2 millions, 4 millions, as demand increased, but West European and American firms could; while pirates in Hong Kong and Taiwan proved even more efficient. Watching helplessly while a tremendous opportunity was being missed, the Hungarian firms lost their head. They tried to deal with Japan directly — although Ideal had the exclusive rights. They went behind Ideal's back but approached one of that company's own agents. This attempt failed to increase confidence in the Hungarians. But then they managed to do something even more disastrous, ordering Rubik Cubes from Hong Kong and passing them off as "Made in Hungary". The result was that out of the 1 million Cubes sent to Switzerland 800,000 were returned as reject.

The implications of all this became clear and as András Mezei describes involved a dash between Western and Communist production methods. As the Cube grew into a world-wide craze, the Americans wanted more and more of them and wanted them immediately. When urgent orders and desperate telephone meetings, various organizations sent "memos" to one another and often failed to reply. The Americans wished to lower the price, to sell more; the Hungarians wanted to raise it to make the most of the huge demand. And there was another significant difference in outlook: Americans were concerned with selling — selling being the problem, almost the religion of the West in Hungary, where good things are hoarded up eagerly, selling is no problem but production is. The world left the Hungarians behind. While they were holding committee meetings, arguing, quarrelling, scheming, and blaming one another for gigantic failure, the Cubes were selling in its millions.

But the Hungarians are, after all, clever people and, it seems, have learnt the main lesson from the affair, that Socialism is the barrier way to Capitalism.

Pioneers of distinction

David Rosand

WILLIAM C. SEITZ
Abstract Expressionist Painting in America
490pp, with colour and black-and-white illustrations. Harvard University Press for the National Gallery of Art, Washington. \$60.
0674002156
SERGE GUILBAUT
How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, freedom, and the Cold War
Translated by Artur Goldhammer
277pp, with black-and-white illustrations. University of Chicago Press. £18.
022631038 8

The position of Abstract Expressionism within the history of modern art seems securely established. In the permanent installations of the recently reopened Museum of Modern Art the galleries devoted to the New York school fully attest to both the status and the stature of that generation of American artists. Indeed, as we look back from a contemporary art scene that can only be described as one of ferment — less generously, as one of chaotic groping and posturing — the Abstract Expressionist canvases at MoMA affirm their aesthetic dignity with special relevance. Created with the radical enthusiasm of a genuine avant-garde and received as serious challenges to traditional values, social as well as aesthetic, these paintings now accept the reverent admiration of the public with all the confidence of confirmed classics. What once seemed impetuous and uncontrolled now appears as harmonious structure; what was once resented as private and enigmatic, arrogant solipsism, has succeeded in reaching out and touching a large public. Celebrated as the "triumph of American painting", Abstract Expressionism signalled the coming-of-age of art in America and the emergence of New York as the modern art capital of the western world.

And yet, despite success and acceptance, Abstract Expressionism continues to pose

problems; despite an enormous critical and historical literature, including innumerable exhibition catalogues, the challenge of interpretation remains. In its own way, each of the books under review seeks to meet that challenge; each refuses to allow those canvases to retire to the comfort of the old master galleries. Their perspectives and approaches to the subject, however, are radically different.

The late William Seitz was a close observer of the movement he wrote about, a painter, critic and curator who participated in those events. Originally submitted as a PhD dissertation to Princeton University in 1955, *Abstract Expressionist Painting in America* had been available only in photocopies of the typescript. Now, nearly thirty years later, it appears in print under the auspices of the National Gallery of Art as one of the Ailsa Mellon Bruce Studies in American Art, with a warm foreword by Robert Motherwell, one of the leading protagonists (and certainly the most frequently quoted) in Seitz's account, and an appreciative introduction by the critic Dore Ashton. Hailing the book as a "classic" in the literature on Abstract Expressionism, Motherwell confirms the special qualifications of Seitz, quoting with approval the author's own self-evaluation: "Whatever unique qualities this book may have . . . arise in part from the fact that it combines the viewpoint of a painter with that of an art historian. If such a blend can constitute a method, it lies in an attempt to reconcile empathy with fact." Throughout the book — which did not win academic acceptance without some special intervention on the part of Alfred Barr — one is aware of that empathy as Seitz responds to the creative process, to technique and materials, and, above all, as he listens to the voices of the artists themselves — recorded in their own occasional writings, in transcripts of meetings, or in Seitz's recollections of discussions at the Artists Club. It is this particularized intimacy of the observing participant that provides much of the conviction of Seitz's narrative.

The book is not a history of the movement.

Organized thematically, it moves deliberately from formal analysis — at times academically Wolffian in its search for "analytical categorization" — to interpretation, from descriptive to transcendental criticism. Across an expanding thematic grid is plotted the art of six individual painters: Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, Hans Hofmann, Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko, and Mark Tobey, who are "presented both as artists of distinction and as pioneers". The selection of these "key artists" may appear somewhat less than fully compelling, especially in the retrospect of three decades. Surely the inclusion of Tobey as a representative of Abstract Expressionism runs counter to our sense of the spirit and scale of that movement. The association violates the style and aesthetic of the painter himself; never really of New York, Tobey belongs elsewhere and has indeed been acknowledged the leading master of a North-West Coast school, responsive to the spiritual values of the Orient. Seitz is obviously deeply sympathetic to this art, but his suggestive linking of its mysticism with the urban existentialism of New York must now seem rather forced.

Hans Hofmann, on the other hand, although significantly older than the others, was indeed a major presence on the New York scene, especially as an articulate and influential teacher; but one may harbour some doubt about the actual importance of his own paintings to the development of Abstract Expressionism in America. Seitz's choice of artists might not seem so idiosyncratic were it not so restrictive, and the absence of Jackson Pollock from his core group can only be seen as a glaring omission. Pollock, to be sure, does figure in Seitz's commentary, where his art evidently causes the critics a certain discomfort, implicitly questioning aspects of Seitz's preferred aesthetic, especially his valuation of the brush: "Keeping the bond between content and material in mind, it may be of value to consider the tendency toward abandonment of the close control that painters have always maintained between the hand and the painting surface. Is the unprecedented method of

Jackson Pollock — whose effectiveness, for himself at least, he has proved — the isolated solution of one painter? Or does it portend a general change in technique?

Pollock posed a particular problem — and we must remember that Seitz was writing in the early 1950s — and yet out of his own doubt Seitz produced some of the most responsive criticism in his book. None the less, we sense that he found in the more overtly crafted surfaces of Tobey an aesthetic more congenial to him, just as he found in Tobey's oriental mysticism the articulation of a kind of spiritual space in which one could transcend the realities of picture-as-object to confront some absolute reality.

If this aspect of Seitz's criticism has not weathered the passage of three decades, his insistence upon values that we might otherwise term humanistic does share in a broader response to and, necessarily, defence of Abstract Expressionism. "Expressionist brushwork", he writes, "establishes a human scale", and both gesture and scale become essential constituents of what we may call the affect of many Abstract Expressionist paintings. Seitz's own painter's sensibility, his awareness of the signifying range of a single stroke, yields some particularly fine observations — such as this passage in response to de Kooning:

From reinforcing vertical, to human gesture, to assertion of space, to description of image — such a sequence is often the meaning-path of one stroke of the brush. In one movement an arm is drawn, fleshy bulk is modeled, and a pocket of recession is formed. If a structural weakness is sensed, as the brush moves its path must change in order to reassert geometrical form and tie image to format. And as the painter's sensibility shifts from intellect to feeling or from intensity to delicacy, the brush follows, solidifying changing meanings in changing form.

More than any other modern style, Abstract Expressionism exulted the personal freedom of the artist while insisting, as a necessary corollary, upon a fundamental pictorial responsibility. "Modern art is related to the problem of the modern individual's freedom", wrote Motherwell in 1944; "For this reason the his-

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tory of modern art tends at certain moments to become the history of modern freedom."

Written before the end of the war, Motherwell's statement — like those of other artists — enunciated the aesthetic morality of a generation emerging from political disillusionment and frustration. Just these elements are central to Serge Guilbaut's *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, a "materialist history of the art of the New York school". The title of his book announces its thesis with a candour at once aggressive and ingenuous. Guilbaut's is "a social study of abstract expressionism which attempts to grasp the reasons American avant-garde art took the abstract form that it did as well as the reasons that form proved so successful."

Recounting the ideological vicissitudes of the American intelligentsia from the Depression to the end of the Second World War, he deliberately locates the artists and their art in that larger political matrix — "injecting art history with a dose of real history", as he proudly puts it, and "dragging art's ideal values through the mud of politics and ideology". The impulse is a salutary one, for Guilbaut does indeed succeed in re-animating the debates and the protagonists of that early period of moral struggle on the Left. But as the story is moulded increasingly to fit the thesis, one loses faith in the historian's revision. The retreat from representation, one of the crucial directions of the movement, is reduced to a conspiratorial caricature by Guilbaut: "the avant-garde's 1947-48 decision to abandon representational [i.e. representational] painting". Beyond a rejection of the art of propaganda and illustration that was the temptation of the 1930s, this complex development becomes essentially a deliberate escape from social responsibility into a self-deceiving political individualism that played into the hands of the dominant liberal ideologues. The creative freedom celebrated by Abstract Expressionism, by the artists and their supporters, was, in effect, co-opted by the United States Information Service and other "cultural" agencies of the Cold

War. Unwittingly, according to Guilbaut's thesis, the new art lent itself to the new ideology in its war against Communism.

The leading voices in this account are those of Meyer Schapiro, Dwight Macdonald and Clement Greenberg, whose writings, as well as the pages of the *Partisan Review*, are cited to trace what Guilbaut calls "the de-Marxization of the American intelligentsia". But Guilbaut is a forceful reader of his texts, and his interpretations involve some very partial citation and, at times, misrepresentation. At the outset, for example, Guilbaut argues for a "conceptual and ideological shift" in Meyer Schapiro's thought between 1936 and 1937, before the paper delivered before the American Artists' Congress, "The Social Bases of Art", and his response to Alfred Barr's formalism, "The Nature of Abstract Art", published in the *Marxist Quarterly*. Given his own ideological commitment, Guilbaut can hardly be expected to recognize certain basic assumptions in Schapiro's texts, or to recall Schapiro's opening declaration of 1936 or to be attentive to its implications: "When we speak in this paper of the social bases of art we do not mean to reduce art to economics or sociology or politics. Art has its own conditions which distinguish it from other activities. It operates with its own special materials and according to general psychological laws."

If there are no real heroes in Guilbaut's reductionist narrative, there are certainly villains — Arthur Schlesinger Jr and his "upbeat ideology", publisher Henry Luce, the art dealer Samuel Kootz, and George C. Marshall, among others — and victims, especially artists whose reputations have faded. "What has become of all the Byron Brownes, the Cori Holts, the Karl Knaths, the Balcomb Greenes, and the Charles Seligers?" Guilbaut asks rhetorically in the hurt tone of the egotistical suspecting conspiracy from above.

American art and American politics are the bed-fellows of one aspect of Guilbaut's thesis — originally submitted as a PhD dissertation at UCLA in 1978. Guilbaut himself is French,

and running through his study is a strong vein of Gallic resentment, sounded initially in his title. New York's victim is Paris. And here, too, history becomes conspiracy, as the transatlantic cultural shift adds a final, foul blow to the fate of France, "which had lost nearly everything in the war — some said even her honor".

With Guilbaut's intention to write a "social study" of Abstract Expressionism — to investigate the increasingly dynamic yet problematic position of art within American society, to question the assumed independence of ideas and art in a "free" society, the cultural manifest destiny proclaimed by post-war America — one can have little quarrel. Yet to write such a study, one that offers a persuasive account, requires a critical approach more sophisticated than Guilbaut's, more sensitive to the deeper complexities of human involvement in and responsibility for historical events. And in the case of art history it must demonstrate a sensitivity to the ways in which art operates and signifies. As a historian of art, in particular, Guilbaut does not always seem in control of his materials: eg. it comes as a surprise to learn that in the period 1947-9 Mark Rothko was "moving away from explicit erotic imagery" (my italics) or that the Ninth Street exhibition in 1951 "presented the work of sixty-one artists, most abstract expressionists (except for Bazilioes, Gottlieb, Newman, and Rothko)" (my italics) — one would like to know Guilbaut's working definition of Abstract Expressionism.

In only one instance does Guilbaut attempt a more or less sustained interpretation of an individual picture, the truest test of the critic. The picture is Jackson Pollock's "Sounds in the Grass: Shimmering Substance" (1946). In that same year, Guilbaut observes, *Fortune* published an article, "coldly detached and therefore troubling, on the atomic explosion at Bikini", which included as illustrations two abstract paintings by Ralston Crawford. Guilbaut's method is to build upon coincidence.

The same public that was reading about the im-

portance of abstract and modern art in magazines like *Fortune*, the same people who were being told of the new art's attempts to represent the unrepresentable and to illustrate the unthinkable and who were thereby made ready to accept the unthinkables in their everyday lives, were also prepared to accept Pollock's "drippings" without undue astonishment, particularly since Pollock's work at this time (see 1946) was rather close to depictions of fragmentation and disintegration.

And from this Pollock's paintings emerge as intelligible symbols of the new society. "Although these first 'over-all' paintings were hard for a majority of the public to accept, because of their uniformity and chaotic composition, informed readers of magazines like *Fortune* could see that they actually represented the modern age, the Atomic Age." Guilbaut — evidently convinced by the aesthetic policies of "magazines like *Fortune*" — proceeds to a reading of "Sounds in the Grass: Shimmering Substance", inversely transposing its title while harnessing the canvas to his own thesis:

In *Shimmering Substance*, the masses of color in the centre of the canvas are placed on a dazzling surface created by a grid of thick white strokes and some luminous yellow circles, a center of energy that can be understood as a sun. The effect recorded by Pollock is one of bedazzlement, such as can be caused by staring too long at the sun, leading to complete perceptual disintegration. The shredding of complex forms by light is more complete and radical than anything accomplished by the Impressionists. This disintegration not only on the surface, as seen, but also in their very essence, owing to the deeply searing quality of the light. What Pollock depicts is a mass of energy that is not merely powerful but also destructive. What is shown, in short, is not the sun but an equivalent, the atomic bomb, transformed as myth.

One can only wonder about Guilbaut's familiarity with this canvas in the Museum of Modern Art — which measures only 30 1/4 by 24 1/2 inches, a rather intimate scale for Pollock — and question the legitimacy of such a wildly apocalyptic reading. The entire passage epitomizes Guilbaut's work, enthusiastic and intelligent yet naive and reductive, blinkered by his own agenda.

More speech than song

Winton Dean

CURTIS A. PRICE
Henry Purcell and the London Stage
380pp. Cambridge University Press. £30.
0521 238315

By common consent Purcell was the greatest English dramatic composer of his age, and perhaps of any other. Yet his fifty stage works, although they fall into all manner of different categories, include only a single short through-composed opera; and although he had gifted contemporaries also writing for the theatre, England, unlike Italy and France, failed to develop a national form of opera. This abstruse situation is generally blamed on Purcell's early death, followed ten years later by waves of Italian invaders, and the obstinate English addiction to a bastard form of semi-opera in which the plot was confined to spoken dialogue, the principal characters did not sing, and most of the music was shunted off into independent masques.

Curtis A. Price in this provocative, closely argued and deeply researched book, by far the most thorough study of Purcell's theatre music, begins by questioning "the assumption that opera in the Italian style [ie through-composed] is the apex of music drama and that those hybrids which mix songs and speech are necessarily inferior". He accepts a recent view that the semi-opera was a stable, rational and successful form. Had this been so, it would scarcely have dried up within a few years of Purcell's death. There is nothing "arrogant" in the conclusion that opera is monarch of the musico-dramatic stage, since it represents a fusion of the two arts on the largest scale and dissolves plot and characters in music. Far that reason alone *Dido and Aeneas*, though (as Dr Price demonstrates) incomplete and untypical at its age, is a more satisfying work of art than any of the semi-operas.

Price is reluctant to admit this, but is too good a scholar to suppress evidence to the contrary, which from time to time spins him

round. He acknowledges a serious imbalance between music and drama over the whole period, and though he makes heroic efforts to disentangle the complex political allegories behind *Dioclesian* and *King Arthur*, they remain a matter for contention, confuse the artistic picture and sometimes inhibit the composer. *King Arthur* may be "an audacious study in irony", but no one can be sure at what or whom it is directed. As Price pertinently remarks, "Tell me why" in *Dioclesian* should have been a fragment of an Italianate opera, not a bit of musical fluff for an overblown masque", and the scene for Grimbold and Philidel in Act II of *King Arthur* shifts to true opera in that "the main plot is borne, if only briefly, by music". The trouble is that such occasions are so rare. There is a touch of special pleading in his claims for *The Fairy Queen* as a Shakespeare-Purcell union, but he ends equivocally with the admission that the music is no help to the play and Purcell's cynical approach to the weddings undermines its romantic spirit. On the other hand he makes out a case that the Shadwell-Locke *Psyche* (1675) is more akin to *dramma per musica* than any of Purcell's stage works except *Dido* and "came much closer to pushing English into the operatic mainstream" than Purcell's semi-operas, which take care to keep music and speech on different planes.

More light is thrown on this in Price's study of the incidental music to plays, which has never before been subjected to such an exhaustive scrutiny. He shirks nothing, exploring the theatrical and social background in an age of perpetually shifting political loyalties, and examining the text of every play in order to assess Purcell's contribution. Here again we find both critic and composer apparently in the posture of Janus. Price argues in effect that some of the incidental music is more operatic than the semi-operas, because it advances the action. He demonstrates Purcell's command of dramatic irony and insight into character, and rightly calls him a tragedian at heart, interested primarily in individuals. Yet he was content to allow offstage professional singers to express the emotions of silent actors, leaving the acca-

dional utterances of the latter to be set by other composers, generally Eccles.

The music can clarify the drama (it is often hard to decide whether the author's intentions are serious, comic or satirical), or at least tell us how Purcell viewed it, though there are occasions when we scarcely know whether he is interpreting the dramatic situation, responding to some strong verbal association, or simply being cynical. Elsewhere his finest contributions may be irrelevant (*The Maid's Last Prayer*) or less suited to the context than to the Last Night of the Proms (*Don Quixote*). Price more than once makes the valid point that "Purcell's music, which lies at the heart of the drama, would almost certainly be misinterpreted without some knowledge of the plot". This impales us on the horns of another dilemma. How can we appreciate Purcell's refinements when there is little chance of these obscure and complex plays (apart from Congreve's two comedies, which surely require their original music) ever reaching the modern stage? For many of them Purcell only wrote two or three songs. The semi-operas (including *The Indian Queen*, which for no clear reason is placed in a separate category) are a different matter; the music is sufficient justification for revival, but the spoken drama should be included in order to place it in context, though this entails a double cast.

Occasional equivocation on aesthetic problems in no way devalues Price's book, which is packed with sage observations on every aspect of Purcell's art, not least his personal use of harmony and tonality. It is illustrated with seven plates and 145 musical quotations, all apposite and some extensive (though page 99 has a reference to something that fails to answer its cue). They are not confined to Purcell; justice is done to Eccles, Locke, Banister and others, not excluding the much-maligned Grabu, whose *Albion* and *Albionis* is shown to

have failed for political rather than artistic reasons. Politics were also responsible for keeping *Dido and Aeneas* off the public stage. Price is illuminating on its political allegory and the links with *Measure for Measure* at the 1700 revival which both truncated the music and modified the play. Apart from some unnecessary rhetorical questions at the start, this is perhaps the most penetrating study of Purcell's masterpiece.

Price shows an impressive command of all sources, musical and literary, quotes unpublished variants, and frequently corrects the text of the Purcell Society editions, for whom both the harmony and the words sometimes proved too juicy. He also takes full account of the work of his predecessors. The one thing he cannot quite dispel is a sense of genius running to waste. The emphatic statement in his preface that "Purcell was a brilliant music dramatist, but he was not an opera composer" could be accepted as the literal truth had the score of *Dido* not survived. Masterpieces are not created by accident; since it does survive, it would be more accurate to call him an opera composer who, whether through disinclination, lack of opportunity or the oppressive weight of the Zeigist, could not fulfil his potential. The powerful English tradition of spoken drama may not have been the sole or even the main obstacle; against a more stable political background, instead of one that put *Dido* rapidly out of court, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that Purcell, endowed as he was with greater creative genius, could have established himself as an English Lully, with immeasurable consequences for English opera.

Joseph Machlis's *The Enjoyment of Music* (originally reviewed in the TLS of January 16, 1959) has been reissued in a fifth, revised edition, adding and substituting the discussion of new works (646pp. Norton. £18.95. 0 393 95297 5).

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"I am not unduly disturbed about our respective responses or lack of responses from Moscow. I have decided they do not use speech for the same purposes that we do."

— Roosevelt, October 27, 1942

"Peace with Germany and Japan on our terms will not bring much rest to you and me (if I am still responsible). As I observed last time, when the war of the giants is over, the war of the pygmies will begin. There will be a torn, ragged and hungry world to help to its feet; and what will Uncle Joe or his successor say to the way we should both like to do it?"

— Churchill, March 17, 1945

COMMENTARY

The ideal of public woman

A. S. Byatt

The Bostonians
Curzon Cinema

The *Bostonians* was to be Henry James's "very American tale". He asked himself "what was the most salient and peculiar point in our social life" and answered "the situation of women, the decline of the sentiment of sex, the agitation on their behalf". The *Bostonians* is dense with the detail of the social life of the world in which James grew up, educated by his Swedenborgian and Fourierist father, a world alive with ideas and isms: spiritualism, mesmerism, Utopian communisms, feminism. When T. S. Eliot wrote that James had a mind so fine that no idea could violate it, he was not mocking, as is often supposed. He was approving James's resistance to the swarming beliefs and causes of his time. James's scepticism about the feminists is liable to disgust modern students and may do so even in this gravely beautiful and narrowly passionate Merchant-Ivory film. That would be a pity. The novel is complicated and arguably one of the greatest written in English: the film is a very considerable achievement.

The key phrase is "the decline of the sentiment of sex". For the elder James the separation and union of the sexes was a primary image of the nature of the universe. His son's novel is a sceptical dramatization of an attempt to deny this "natural" order. The essence of the plot of *The Bostonians* is the battle for the soul of the beautiful "inspired" Verena Tarrant (daughter of a mesmerist and spiritual healer) between Olive Chancellor, spinster Bostonian aristocrat, and Basil Ransom, her down-at-heel cousin from Mississippi, a Southern gentleman. It is a battle between the "personal" (with overtones of the integrity of the personality) and the "public" (with overtones of disgrace and the public's power).

Making the language work

Stanley Wells

Playing Shakespeare
Channel Four
JOHN BARTON
Playing Shakespeare
211pp. Methuen. £9.95 (paperback, £4.95).
0431547809

In a foreword to the book *Playing Shakespeare* Trevor Nunn, besides writing vividly and affectionately of John Barton, defines a "method and principle of an approach to acting Shakespeare which has been fundamental to the Royal Shakespeare Company since it was formed". This approach attempts both "to serve the complexities and contradictions of the text" and "to make the language work, and to be alive and exciting in the theatre". The definition describes too the strengths and some limitations of the nine television programmes shown on Channel Four and of the book based on them. The topic is very much the language and its vocal projection: there is little concern with other aspects of "playing", such as gesture, facial expression, make-up, movement, position relative to other actors; and only late in the book, in a programme that has not been screened, does John Barton talk about costumes and sets. A reader who had seen none of his productions might almost be forgiven for assuming that he worked mainly for radio. Nevertheless, what most distinguishes Shakespeare from other writers is the richness of his prose and verse: to concentrate on the problems of realizing his language is to approach the heart of the uniquely Shakespearean experience. And the topic is laid out with admirable clarity. Each programme (or chapter) concentrates on a particular aspect first, what Barton calls "Objective Things" — such as acting styles and problems posed by set speeches and soliloquies; second, "Subjective Things" — such as irony and ambiguity, passion and coolness, and exploration of character. Barton is present throughout as ex-

and money). Olive believes in Verena as a feminist public speaker. Basil, writing unfashionably and unsuccessfully against democracy — he reads Carlyle and de Tocqueville — does not. Christopher Reeve plays Basil with exactly the right combination of easy sensual insistence, gentlemanly courtesy and single or simple-minded determination to cause Verena to flower in a private life with him. Vanessa Redgrave's Olive is magnificently conceived, both in moments of gawky and desperately gentle tenderness with Verena and in the compressed agony of her social appearances — above all at Mrs Burrage's New York soirée where Verena speaks to an enraptured audience and Olive is contorted by fear of losing her, pride in her "gift", contempt for and fear of her hostess and Basil Ransom. Madeleine Potter as Verena looks a little too ordinarily pretty, not strange or distinct enough, but acts with a kind of sexual intelligence and dignity, in her scenes with both male and female lover, which is impressive.

The film must centre on this triangle. It must also render Olive more sympathetic, dramatized and separate, than James does, who shows some animus against her even while recording her pain in detail. He indulged in an unusually pointed mockery of most of his characters, particularly in the earlier chapters of the book, where the battling women are caricatured with a chilly ferocity. Partly under pressure from William James he toned this down, and the aged Miss Birdseye of the film (Jessica Tandy) and the austere humorous little woman doctor Prance (Linda Hunt) are seen with the affection of his later vision. I waited in vain in the excellently comic scene between Ransom and the purlind and wholly charitable-minded Miss Birdseye (here set in a public library) for her to utter her absurd and moving line: "Do you regard us then, simply as lovely baubles?" Ruth Praver Jhobvala's script, nevertheless, as always, does marvels in connecting and preserving the text and its texture.

positor, commentator, and director of the varying groups of actors who take part in each programme. Tall, plumpening, moving with a bear-like shamble, wearing an everlasting cardigan and a perpetual tie, he addresses both viewers and actors with amiable eagerness. Clearly he is a born teacher.

In the television version, he has two sets of pupils: the viewers, who may be assumed to be relatively unaware of the backstage business of putting on a play, and the actors with whom he discusses selected passages, and who perform the illustrations. There are several points of artificiality about the set-up. It takes place in a mock-up of a rehearsal room; a central acting area is surrounded by a carefully assembled litter of tables, chairs, props, banners and coffee cups. Actors, dressed informally, hang around the edge of the playing space when they are not performing. Cameras and cameramen are undisguised. Generally, the programmes are scripted. Some actors — notably David Suchet — are good at acting spontaneity; others — notably Donald Sinden — appear actually to achieve it; but sometimes we are over-aware that answers to questions have been set up beforehand.

The medium imposes problems of scale. Actors rehearse as for the stage, but they act to the camera, sometimes in close-up. Thus, Alan Howard and Michael Pennington speak soliloquies of Henry VI and Hamlet with moving intimacy but in a manner that would have to be greatly adjusted in a theatre. And there are problems of credibility. Most of the performers are re-enacting roles that they know intimately and in which Barton himself rehearsed them for their stage performances. Indeed, it is a pleasure of the series that we can encounter again snatches from some of the RSC's most greatly admired productions: Peggy Ashcroft as Queen Margaret (still lapsing) and the Countess; Judi Dench and Richard Pasco in *Twelfth Night*; Patrick Stewart as Shylock. But it is hard to believe that they are studying their roles from the ground upwards, even if one looks on the sessions as a series of master-classes.



"Aphrodite" by Henry Holiday from Beauty's Awakening. An exhibition to celebrate a centenary of the Art Workers Guild at Brighton Museum.

And both novel and film leave us with the image of the detached, the unfeminine, the dignified and useful Dr Prance, rather than the agitators, as the ideal of public woman. But she can afford to be simply public, having no "sentiment of sex".

The film works too at the mythic level on which Basil Ransom, with his symbolic name, is either the redeemer (Love) rescuing the soul (Verena) from the doom of the Old Testament (Olive Chancellor, the Law) or alternatively

gloomy Dis, snatching the Spring away from Demeter to live in his underworld. Christopher Reeve is always a black and threatening figure in the landscapes. The scenes, filmed in Martha's Vineyard, where the distraught Olive runs up and down the shore in the growing dusk, seeking the girl who had promised to go to Ransom for only ten minutes, are both visually beautiful, and chilling images of a world from which the light is receding, really and symbolically. The seasons move from spring to winter as Olive's love flourishes and is destroyed. The gloom of the Boston Music Hall from which Ransom snatches his bride/prey, hooded in black, is grandly comic, and something more. "Why, Verena," says Miss Birdseye, as Verena brushes her brow, after having kissed Ransom, "how cold your lips are." It is the touch of approaching death. Film and novel are profoundly ambivalent about the gains and losses of Verena's entry, in tears, into that "world, so far from brilliant".

There is a pun here too about the State of the Union after the Civil War. The film places this historically with great economy, making its points with martial music for Basil, "My Country 'tis of Thee", fireworks of Stars and Stripes on the Glorious Fourth, and the awkward emotions of Basil's visit to the Harvard memorial for his youthful dead. It offers us, with Walter Lassally's camera, Boston, lovely and sinister, with its uncompromising dark verticals, deep creamy colours, soft red brick, a decorum tinged with the decay and madness of the world from which Verena came, the world of "whites, wizards and mediums, Spirit-rappers and roaring radicals". Perhaps in the end, despite all the real, close passion, this film is almost too lingeringly beautiful, too preserved. There is something in the prose, the solidity of specification of this one novel of James's, which derives from the swarming hallucinatory world of Dickens or the discomposed vision of Balzac. The film has a classical quality: the novel, in the most positive sense, grotesque.

conception of a production may be mine, the actual performance is something that in a deep sense no longer really belongs to me." For better or for worse, the actor's art is inextricably entangled with every detail of his being: a point that was forcibly made by Barton's production of *Richard II*, in which Ian Richardson and Richard Pasco alternated the roles of Richard and Bolingbroke. It is a strength of John Barton's direction, as revealed here, that he acts as a catalyst to each actor's individual qualities. Viewers may receive a stronger intuitive sense of those qualities, but readers will find them illicitly expounded.

AUTHOR, AUTHOR

Competition No 195

Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach this office not later than November 2. A prize of £20 is offered for the first correct set of answers opened on that date, or failing that the most nearly correct — in which case inspired guesswork will also be taken into consideration. Entries, marked "Author, Author 195" on the envelope, should be addressed to the Editor, *The Times Literary Supplement*, Priory House, St John's Lane, London EC1M 4BX. The solution and results will appear on November 9.

1 Item a capon . . . 2s. 2d.
Item sauce . . . 4d.
Item sack two gallons . . . 5s. 8d.
Item anchovies and sack after supper . . . 2s. 6d.
Item bread . . . 10b.

2 You could buy things worth having for a farthing in those days. Most sweets were four ounces a penny, and there was even some stuff called Paradise Mixture, mostly broken sweets from other bottles which was six. Then there were Farthing Everlastings, which were a yard long and couldn't be finished inside half an hour.

3 "Can I have my change please?"
"Change?"
"Yes, change. Can I have it please?"
"Five shillings you give me."
"Yes. The bill was four shillings. I want a shilling back."

"Wasn't that for my tip?"
"It might have been, but it isn't now. Check it up."
"The whole shilling?"
"Yes. All of it. Now. Give it to me."
The waiter made no attempt to produce any money. In this half-choked voice he said: "Most people give me a tip."

Competition No 191

Winner: Smrah Gearhart

Answers:

1 The moon in the bureau mirror looks out at a million miles (and perhaps with pride, at herself, but she never, never smiles) far and away beyond sleep, or perhaps she's a daytime sleeper. Elizabeth Bishop, "Insomnia".

2 To gravity attentive, she can notice nothing here, though we — Whom hunger does not move from gardens where we feel secure Look up and with a sigh endure The tyrannies of love. W. H. Auden, "A Summer Night".

3 But while the moon is rounding towards the left He follows whatever whim's most difficult Among whims not impossible, and though secure As body the cat-o'-nine-tails of the mind His body moulded from within his body Crows compiler. W. B. Yeats, "The Phases of the Moon".

The struggle for mastery

John Deathridge

RICHARD WAGNER
Tannhäuser
Royal Opera House

"Wagner has finished another opera", Schumann wrote to Mendelssohn on October 22, 1845. "But it lacks pure harmony and skilful four-part writing . . . and now he wants changes and cuts — too late!" After seeing *Tannhäuser* on stage Schumann wrote to Mendelssohn again three weeks later that he had changed his mind. "I was quite touched by many things", he confessed.

Schumann's volte-face had some prophetic ingredients. Wagner not only demanded changes and cuts after the première of *Tannhäuser* on October 19, 1845, he carried them out immediately and continued to make more of them for the next thirty years. His later remarks on the opera invariably imply that it was "too late" to create the perfect version, let alone the perfect performance of it (an unsurprising streak of fatalism considering the other back-breaking projects that preoccupied him). Schumann's initial objections were those of a musical purist unswayed by the realities of the theatre, as he himself recognized. Yet Wagner's critique of his own opera had similar echoes. When he wrote to Mathilde Wesendonck in April 1860 that "mastery" had eluded him when composing *Tannhäuser* it was a remark prompted by high musical ambition, despite his dramaturgical justification of it. (The Venusberg music, he told her, was lacklustre

and therefore without the power to give the ensuing tragedy sufficient weight.)

Schumann's affection for *Tannhäuser* was shared by large sections of the musical public in the nineteenth century. Indeed, the opera's popularity was so great, and its overture so famous, that any attempt to change it seemed doomed from the outset. After the first performance Wagner drastically reduced the orchestral introduction to Act 3, only to be besieged by members of the orchestra demanding its reinstatement. (The version played today is a compromise.) For the Paris performances of 1861 he decided to make a large cut in the overture and to let it run straight into the opening bacchanal. But Paris refused to be deprived of the piece it knew best and insisted on hearing all of it. In addition Wagner deliberately set out to "astonish" the Parisians with a new orchestral *pièce de résistance* for the bacchanal (even the boss tuba has a virtuoso part aptly described by Richard Strauss as "an expression of animal-like sensuality"), and he enriched Venus's *paradis artificiel* with an extraordinary stylistic mosaic in which gorgeous *Tristan*-like sounds are stitched onto stiffer, four-square phrases written sixteen or seventeen years earlier. Yet this ambitious display of musical pyrotechnics found little sympathy in the day-to-day operatic routine of German opera houses already familiar with the older version. For this reason Albert Niemann, who had made a terrific reputation as *Tannhäuser* in Germany, adamantly refused in Paris to comply with Wagner's alterations to the song contest in Act 2. It was too late: the opera's quasi-religious utopianism and the vulnerable

contrasts, these two spheres also receive very differing treatments: where one's caricatured, the other's idealized.

This means that Michael Lindsay-Hogg's adaptation inevitably seems a patchwork — though one containing plenty of good material. Many of the film's performances are outstanding. Alan Bates gives a sturdy, adroitly ordinary portrayal of Jones; Greta Scacchi makes an extraordinarily attractive Anna-Luise. Cyril Cusack, crumpled face and slackened body draped around a core of crushed decency, is moving as Steiner, the man whom Fischer has ruined. James Mason's depiction of Fischer, never missing a nuance or cadence of withering, withering contempt, stands as a consummate conclusion to his distinguished career.

Scenes involving these characters are usually charged with intensity. But the work's moral allegorical components never seem charged with corresponding power. Faithfully, the film picks up the book's intimations that Fischer is a diabolic figure: "He's just hell", "Go and be damned", etc. The production strives imaginatively to give an infernal tinge to his ambience: a red-carpeted staircase snakes towards his quarters; bonfires blaze in his joy grounds, recalling the freezing fires of hell. Greene's tableaux of evil in this work, though, are more lurid than searing. Much of *Doctor Fischer* is like a Morality Play in which there's only one garishly emblazoned — Deadly Sin: Greed. In the film, some of the actors embodying this tend to ham up the piggishness. All are vigorously voracious, champing their avid, nauseated way through cloying mouthfuls of cold porridge as well as swallowing insults dished out by Fischer about their shortcomings — from premature ejaculation to craven cowardice. But you're never convinced that even these vulgar vultures would stomach not only systematic humiliation but also constant reminders from Fischer about what he's doing to them.

Admirably faithful to Greene's work, for the most part, the adaptation makes a few modifications. As if to allow for inflation, the massive cheques Fischer dangles before his gaudy guests here swell from the book's two million francs to five million. Unavoidably perhaps, some of Greene's fine, fierce moments have to be lost. Instead of ending with Fischer's suicide, the film — in a closing shot that now has added poignancy — concludes with James Mason moving away into darkness.

The fascination of frontiers

Peter Kemp

Greene at 80
Radio 4
Doctor Fischer of Geneva
BBC2

"Old age is like a wreck upon the bay. / The sails are down. They do not feel the wind", recited Graham Greene on Radio 4's eightieth birthday tribute, then breezily burst out laughing at the sentiments voiced in this poem he wrote when he was twenty. Far from being in the doldrums, the programme's interview brought out, he's still in buoyant form, still able — as extracts from his recent work demonstrated — to send prose scudding along at a cracking pace.

Greene at 80 — a nicely put together résumé of his achievements — was especially useful in giving some overall indication of the characteristic contours of his fictional world. Demarcation lines run across Greene's imaginative landscapes. Geographical and political frontiers fascinate him: crossing them is often a matter of life-or-death significance for his characters. Key events to his work tend to occur at transi-points: border-posts, customs sheds, ports or railway stations. People with split allegiances — spies, double agents, religious backsliders — are a speciality.

Greene's childhood experiences at Berkhamsted School, where his father was headmaster, gave him the mould, as Nigel Lewis's account showed, from which his fiction emerged. This is something with which Greene himself concurred, adding that most of his writing is helmsmarked by the same traits: only in a few works has he managed "to alter the keynote, to disrupt the pattern". One of them, he feels, is *Doctor Fischer of Geneva*, a film version of which was transmitted on BBC 2.

It wasn't perhaps, the best-chosen of offerings. Untypical of Greene in its investment in fantasy, the book is also untypical in that it's far less exciting. True, it deals in dichotomies of a kind his interest generally warrants, but it does so in a simplistic and schematic way. The world of Fischer (greedy, loveless and exploitative; enthroned in a bleak mansion) is set against that of Jones and Anna-Luise (generous, loving, compassionate, enshrined in a warmly domestic flat). Offering stark moral

operatic form it required were already tainted with the decrenateated odour and immovable strength of a public institution.

It would be churlish to say that the opening night of Covent Garden's new *Tannhäuser* was little better than an average performance in a provincial German opera house. Certainly, the orchestra sounded under-rehearsed and so did the pilgrims' choruses. Even Randová, singing Venus for the first time in England, made nonsense of the part with an unhearably plummy tone and hardly a single consonant. Colin Davis's conducting was disappointingly uneven and only really sprang to life for the big tune or exciting stretto. Timothy O'Brien's scenery and Nick Chelton's lighting showed the exotisms of the Venusberg in dull hues and allowed the more sombre world of the Hall of Song to glow in rich colours so that the latter at times seemed more erotic than the former. And Covent Garden has decided inexplicably to shorten the overture (as Wagner wanted it in Paris) while retaining the earlier Dresden version of the bacchanal and Venus scenes. Thus the audience is deprived of both the magnificent coda of the original overture and the ambitious musical *avant-gardisme* with which Wagner wanted to impress the Parisians.

Yet for all this the production is definitely worth seeing. If the musical side comes perilously close to bind operatic routine, the producer Elijah Moshinsky has at least lavished some care on this awkward and fascinating work that just saves it from disaster. There are weak moments, the worst of which is the insipid ballet in the Venusberg. But elsewhere there are good ideas, especially in Moshinsky's interpretation of Elisabeth, strongly played and sung by Gwyneth Jones. Wagner claimed that if Act 3 were to make sense an emphatic delivery of Tannhäuser's words "Zum Heil den Sündigen zu führen" towards the end of Act 2 should be allowed to shift the focus of attention

from Elisabeth to Tannhäuser. Bravely, Moshinsky has disregarded this and kept Elisabeth to the fore, allowing her to be seen kneeling on stage even before Act 3 begins, a position she retains with visible emotional involvement throughout the orchestral introduction. As a rule this piece of pure programme music only makes sense *a posteriori* when much of it is repeated in Tannhäuser's Rome Narration. The daring tautology rarely works in practice, as Wagner often admitted. Yet in Moshinsky's production it does, largely because the music is first heard as an expression of Elisabeth's feelings. Not only does it carry her through the difficult prayer in Act 3, the ensuing confrontation between Tannhäuser and Wolfram is also heightened by a double perspective which shows that the sensual pain of Tannhäuser's Rome Narration is Elisabeth's too — an interpretation uncomfortably close to the aesthetics of *Tristan* perhaps, but undeniably effective in the theatre.

Any staging of *Tannhäuser* inevitably raises the question of whether it can be produced convincingly at all. Wagner himself believed that a production must stand or fall by the acting and vocal ability of the protagonist. Moshinsky's Tannhäuser on the opening night was Klaus König, an East German *Helikopter* whose efficient and unexciting performance only succeeded in casting doubt on Wagner's opinion. As Schumann suspected, the real trouble is that the music of *Tannhäuser* is dangerously uneven and needs love and affection in the theatre to coax it into life. The only artists who seemed to understand this (apart from Moshinsky) were Gwyneth Jones and Thomas Allen or Wolfram. Both gave deeply felt performances that banished thoughts of "pure harmony" and "skilful four-part writing" (or rather the luck of them) and allowed us to glimpse the vitality and dramatic genius this flawed masterpiece still contains.

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The spying business

Zara Steiner

CHRISTOPHER ANDREW and DAVID DILKS
(Editors)

The Missing Dimension: Governments and intelligence communities in the twentieth century
300pp. Macmillan. £16.95.
0333 368649
CHRISTOPHER DOBSON and RONALD PAYNE
The Dictionary of Espionage
234pp. Harrap. £9.95.
0245 542019

Is it not just a "great game"? Brought up in a tradition of best-selling spy stories extending from the fantasies of William Le Queux to the triumphs of James Bond and the more sombre world of Smiley's friends, readers of today's revelations about moles and Mata Harris might well be excused for confusing fiction and fact. Nor, in a world of spy satellites, is it surprising that sceptics ask whether agents and counter-agents are really necessary and whether we should not know more about what is being done in our name and with our money. *The Missing Dimension*, consisting of a humorous but wide-ranging and hard-hitting preface and eleven articles, illustrates the erratic and even farcical evolution of our modern "intelligence communities" and points up the unresolved paradoxes created by their growth and professionalization in democratic societies. The collection is not a contribution to the traditional school of fantasy; all but one of the pieces — Robert Cecil's refreshing treatment of the "Cambridge Comintern", based on personal experience — rest primarily on documentary sources.

The editors clearly wish to stress the historical importance of their subject and the academic respectability of their enquiries. For despite the elements of comedy and sport, and a tradition of gentlemen and players fast vanishing from the present scene, intelligence services have provided information in war and peace.

Christopher Andrew, whose pioneering work on the Cambridge spy case will appear in 1985, surveys the development of cryptanalysis in the 1920s by comparing the pre-1914 French experience with subsequent British and American advances. In all three cases, inter-bureaucratic rivalry and the inability of governments to handle the new intelligence sources delayed the emergence of professional departments. Despite impressive French cryptographic successes against Britain and Germany, fierce rivalry between the "cabinets noirs" of the Quai d'Orsay and the Sûreté, and indiscretions on the part of the French Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary in 1911, prompted the Germans successfully to change their codes. Britain and the United States only re-entered the race during the Great War. The former remained in a state of "cryptographic innocence" from 1844 until the wartime activities of Captain "Blinker" Hall and Room 40 at the Admiralty (of Zimmerman Telegram fame) and the War Office's MI-1b re-established British code-breaking. American cryptanalysis owed its unlikely origins to

the merchant and honorary Kentucky Colonel, George Fabyan, who was searching for the Baconian cipher to Shakespeare's plays. The comic-opera side of both the British and American intelligence services between the wars is well depicted by Dr Andrew. The two British units, after fierce inter-fighting, were merged into a single Government Code and Cypher School (GC&CS) and placed under the reluctant tutelage of the Foreign Office, as was MI5 or Secret Intelligence Service (SIS). Repeatedly, government ministers openly proclaimed the contents of the successfully intercepted Soviet diplomatic telegrams; Curzon actually taunted the Russians with his knowledge. Not surprisingly, in 1927 they adopted the theoretically unbreakable one-time pads, depriving GC&CS of its best source. The SIS was starved of men and funds; the Foreign Office was acutely uncomfortable about its cover, the Passport Control Department and its overseas representatives. SIS shunned university types, preferring, in Hugh Trevor-Roper's words, "minds untainted by the solvent force of a university education". As Cecil shows in his essay, the Comintern had fewer inhibitions. As late as 1938, SIS was a weak, inefficient and overstretched organization, poorly placed to monitor German developments because of its earlier excessive concern with the Bolshevik menace.

The American story was hardly more encouraging. After quite spectacular successes, particularly during the Washington Conference, peacetime regulations forbidding the interception of radio traffic cut the post-war Black Chamber's supply source. In 1929, Secretary of State Henry Stimson ("Gentlemen did not read each other's mail") put an end to the Black Chamber and its "unethical" activities. Fortunately, an Army Signal Intelligence Service headed by William Friedman and a parallel Navy unit continued the Black Chamber's work, married by the usual competition and lack of funds until wartime improvements on both fronts paved the way for the 1940 breaking of "Purple", the Japanese diplomatic code.

Eunan O'Hallpin graphically describes the unfortunate results of such inter-service rivalry. There were five competing intelligence services at work in Ireland between 1914 and 1921. Poor communication between Dublin and London was compounded by unclear and contradictory political aims. The celebrated "Blinker" Hall withheld vital decrypted information from Dublin House in 1916 and then actually invented a "German plot" in 1918. If it were not so carefully documented, O'Hallpin's essay might be classified under "tall tales". The development of most Western intelligence systems was delayed and confused by domestic rivalries between separate agencies.

Wesley Wark and David Dilks draw attention to the kinds of information that can be found in the public records. Dr Wark, in his study of military and economic assessments of Nazi Germany, illustrates how each service and the newly created Industrial Intelligence Service evolved its own independent, specialized and false view of German war preparedness. The Army and Air Force were unduly optimistic about German plans until 1938 (the Navy until even later) and then, adopting a worst-case scenario, magnified the threat during the crises of 1938. The SIS fuelled government fears exaggerating the measure and success of German industrial mobilization, and then, along with the service departments, contributed to an upsurge in confidence in the post-Munich period by noting British success in closing the arms-race gap against a supposedly well-mobilized enemy. Strikingly, the new assessment did not result from any improvement in the actual balance of military forces but from a dramatic shift of perspective once it was assumed that war was inevitable. Wark may underestimate COS concern with the building of an Eastern and Balkan front, the strategic rationale behind the British guarantee of 1939, but his critique of the 1939 Strategic Appreciation shows how intelligence can be dangerously misinterpreted.

Professor Dilks casts considerable light on the relations between the Foreign Office and its SIS stepchild. He gives a rare example of an SIS paper (September 18, 1938) actually offering advice on high policy and making recommendations that were subsequently adopted by government ministers. Other essays are cited, many from the period between January and August 1939, where specific intelligence reports, true and false, became the basis for diplomatic and strategic decisions. He also shows, how British security leaks from the Ruine embassy and the British Legation to the Holy See (located in the quarters of a branch of the Italian military forces) provided Mussolini and Ciano with excellent diplomatic ammunition against the British, compromising in turn both the King of Greece and Prince Paul of Yugoslavia. The story of Signor Constantini rivals the better-known "Cicero" episode in its more bizarre details. It will seem hardly credible to anyone not familiar with Foreign Office attitudes toward administration and security. At least Constantini was a foreigner; officials can only be condemned for negligence and stupidity though the trail may be traced back to the "inner circle" at the Foreign Office.

A good many members of the diplomatic service just could not take questions of security seriously. This is all too clearly brought out in Cecil's piece about Blunt, Burgess, Maclean and Philby. Cecil was the Foreign Office liaison man with SIS during the war (the biographical notes to this volume might have been expanded) and knew the men about whom he writes. In his portrait of the world that produced, nurtured, protected and rewarded the "Cambridge Comintern", he raises questions too often avoided by academic commentators. He shows convincingly that there was a moral evidence which might have cast doubt on the probity and professional fitness of each of these men, evidence that was forgotten, ignored, or purposely overlooked by well-meaning and often, though not always, intelligent friends and colleagues. The Foreign Office did not vet its diplomats (consultative officials — the Cinderella of the diplomatic world — were more thoroughly investigated); if one family was not known to the principal private secretary, the names and positions of one's referees were a sufficient guarantee of community standing.

The Foreign Office remained an extended family well into the post-1945 period, with the benefits as well as the drawbacks of such a basically homogenous unit. It seems fair to suggest that the wartime successes of Bletchley Park, its staff recruited through the old boys' and old girls' networks without formal security clearance, owed much to a common set of unspoken assumptions and shared language, however different the personalities of the individuals involved. The intimacies and trust, even that mandarin tone, which gave the Foreign Office its reputation, made it easier for betrayal to be concealed. For a few, the Soviets offered a positive ideological orientation that the looser and less clearly defined liberalism of British élite circles could not match. Nazism did not offer an attractive alternative; there were, we think, no Nazi spies at Bletchley.

David Kahn, in his concise and instructive survey of code-breaking successes in the two world wars, attributes Allied superiority during the Second World War to better organization and unified control. There seems little doubt from the numerous books, official and otherwise, that have appeared since the publication of Colonel Bertrand's memoirs in 1973 that Enigma was the British success story of the war. Code-breakers and intelligence, as Kahn makes clear, do not win wars but shorten them (the Second World War by at least three years according to Hinsley) and save lives.

Jean Stenger's most original essay uses new documentary sources and personal interviews to describe the French and Polish as well as the British contribution to the 1940 success in deciphering the Enigma intercepts. The French provided the Poles with the first German codes and ciphers, the so-called Aschén documents. The Poles, principally through a brilliant mathematician, Marian Rejewski (who was in Britain during the war but knew nothing about Bletchley Park), contributed the theories and machines which resulted in the first breaking of Enigma in 1933. British work between August 1939 and May 1940 owed a good deal to Polish information and an Enigma replica built in London in the summer of 1939. Subsequent advances were of a different order, the

product of new methods devised by the "Cambridge mathematicians", John Herivel, Alan Turing and Gordon Welchman, whose own book *The Hut-6 Story* is a mine of technical information.

In a book heavily focused on British intelligence it is particularly useful to have Jürgen Rohwer's authoritative review of his multinational archival work on the role of radio intelligence in the Battle of the Atlantic. He surveys the early B-Dienst successes against British convoy ciphers and the two phases of the Battle of the Atlantic in 1941 and 1943. It is interesting that Rohwer, like Hinsley and Patrick Beesly, sees the 1943 breakthrough as one of Bletchley Park's greatest achievements, though in terms of British survival the setback to the German U-boat campaign in 1941 may have been more critical.

The last two essays in this collection return to a crucial question. Democracy and covert intelligence make uneasy bedfellows. Harry Ransom's contribution to the Central Intelligence Agency brings this out sharply. The story is one of covert operations impinging more and more on the gathering and analysis of information. Since the mid-1950s, the pendulum has swung between independence and accountability as the Cold War has waxed and waned. Ironically, and in contrast to Britain, the CIA is the most publicized cloak-and-dagger outfit on the planet. It advertises openly for agents. Numerous Congressional and press investigators scrutinize its less savoury exploits.

In Britain, the scene is elegantly different. The very term "intelligence community" suggests a harmonious interplay between the various agencies and government control. This velvet term may, in fact, be quite misleading. Parliament simply lacks the investigative powers of its Washington counterpart. But any honest observer will find both archaic and self-defeating the refusal of successive British cabinets to create an intelligence select committee. Similarly, present methods used to protect the secrecy of the intelligence community have failed to prevent damaging disclosures. Alastair Palmer's study of the history of the D-Notice Committee shows the degree to which the assumptions upon which the old system of voluntary self-censorship rested have been abandoned in recent years. The committee was created as the result of the same pre-First World War spy scare that produced the Official Secrets Act. It was intended by the War Office as a means of avoiding confrontation with Fleet Street and was cemented by the "old school" code of honour. The arrangements were continued during the inter-war years but such was the lack of interest in defence and security questions that after 1923 the committee did not meet again for twenty-three years.

The revived and radically changed post-1945 system worked because its secretary, Admiral Thomson, cultivated editors to gain the press's trust and used his common sense on security questions. But this informal network could not survive the harsher world of the Cold War and a new mood in Fleet Street. Investigative journalism resulted in clashes with the government; the Altken case and Harold Wilson's vendetta against Chapman Pincher brought the D-Notice Committee into disrepute. Compliance with its rulings offered no protection against official wrath; non-compliance did not result in imprisonment. The general consensus as to what constituted the "national interest" was eroded just as the "Influential Britons' Club" was losing its hold. At the time of the Falklands campaign, the press and government were at each other's throats; the D-Notice Committee was not even consulted. It seems highly doubtful, whatever the merits of the government's stand on the Hollis matter, that the present position of secrecy can possibly be maintained.

If this book alerts readers to the importance of intelligence and encourages historians to widen their perspectives and researches, it has more than served its purpose. And if the editors can convince the government that the release of intelligence records for the pre-First World War period will not endanger the security of the nation, they may begin a process that will have far greater implications than the opening of files on British intelligence in the Turist Russia might suggest.

The product of Bletchley

John Keegan

F. H. HINSLEY, E. E. THOMAS, C. F. G. RANSOM and R. C. KNIGHT
British Intelligence in the Second World War: Volume 3, Part 1
693pp. HMSO. £17.95.
011 6309350

F. H. Hinsley's magnificent official history of British intelligence continues its forward march, in this volume from the middle of 1943, when the Battle of the Atlantic had just passed its crisis, to the eve of the D-Day landings in June 1944. A fourth volume, Part 2 of this section, will take the story to the end of the war. It will be awaited with the greatest interest. The British official histories have been compared unfavourably hitherto with their American counterparts, and with some justice. None of the operational studies match in scope, quality, interest or readability the American naval histories produced by Samuel Eliot Morison's team or the army histories inspired by the methods of S. L. A. Marshall. Hinsley and his colleagues have redressed the balance. Their work is unique, the first official history of the operations of an intelligence system produced by any country, and of a quality that satisfies both the expert seeking elucidation of a particular inquiry and the general reader seeking enlightenment about what an intelligence service does.

That Volume 3 sustains the interest aroused by Volumes 1 and 2 is a tribute to the Hinsley team's mastery of their material and their method — now highly developed. For, in a paradoxical sense, this middle period of the war does not serve them well. In their first volumes they were documenting a secret — that the British had been able to read the German ciphers. In their second they were demonstrating how decrypting was made to work to Britain's advantage. The breaking of the *Kriegsmarine's* Shark key in December 1942 was crucial to the defeat of Dönitz's wolf-pack system in the Battle of the Atlantic in March 1943, as was the breaking of the German army's Chaffinch and Phoenix keys to the victory of Alamein. Here they are dealing with the doldrums of the Western allies' war. The crisis of the struggle at sea was past, in the Atlantic if not the Pacific, which lies outside the history's ambit. The strategic bombing campaign against Germany had not got into its stride, while Germany's aerial attack on Britain was in suspension. The North African operations had been triumphantly concluded but the invasion of Europe not yet begun, unless the Italian campaign is accepted, as it was by the British but not the Americans, as a strategic alternative. However hard the intelligence system struggled to prepare the ground for victories, therefore, the absence of a focus of decisive conflict, a *Schwerpunkt*, frustrated it. D-Day and round-the-clock bombing would create such *Schwerpunkte*. Until their creation, the intelligence system — Bletchley, SIS, SOE, the service departments — could only keep watch and ward.

What, then, does this volume tell us that we wish and need to know? First, about the state and development of the intelligence system itself. As the earlier volumes revealed, the Government Code and Cypher School (Bletchley Park) took time to establish both its expertise and its credentials. By 1943 both were hallmarked by glittering success and to be allowed access to Bletchley's "product" had become the touchstone of status in wartime Whitehall, rather than the other way about. The numbers of its staff had continued to expand (to about 9,000) in response to objective needs; of which the most important was to decrypt the transmissions of the *Geheimschreiber* (Fish); the tape-fed on-line encrypting machine through which, from 1942 onwards, more and more of Germany's high-grade strategic communications were processed. This decrypting, largely dependent upon the building of the Colossus machines ("pioneer programmable electro-mechanical computers") in the first half of 1943, resulted in the product of a great deal of high-grade intelligence of durable value. Its acquisition may be regarded as the supreme triumph, at a purely intellectual level, of the Bletchley effort, since Fish was broken by sheer brainpower. The logical basis for the effort probably depended upon the

theoretical work of Alan Turing, that strange and tragic genius of British mathematics who spent his war years at Bletchley. But the crucial observations of flaws in the German traffic management and their mechanical exploitation was the work of others, notably Tutte, Newman, Michie and Good.

The accepted super-ordination of Bletchley and its "Special Intelligence" was matched by a smothering of frictions between most of the other intelligence branches. SIS had done much to restore its credibility, damaged by the destruction of its European networks in 1940–41. It was still apparently not maintaining agents in Germany but had re-established outposts in Norway, France, Switzerland and part of the Balkans. Sweden was a particularly rich source; hints in the text suggest that such occasional reports as came from within Germany were brought by Swedes with freedom to travel there. Its relations with Special Operations Executive (SOE) were still squally; like the service intelligence departments, the traditional secret service regarded with suspicion an organization dedicated to subversion and sabotage. But SOE's own humiliation in Holland in 1942 had restrained its efforts to displace SIS in operational intelligence-gathering. The two continued to compete in France and elsewhere; only in Yugoslavia did SOE acquire a free hand. Both had their differences with OSS, the American organization which combined intelligence and subversive work under one head, but inter-Allied diplomacy at the Chiefs of Staff level kept these within check.

In the hiatus between the North African victory and the invasion of Europe, the weight of British intelligence work was concentrated on ascertaining German intentions and capabilities and the effect on them of Allied efforts at sea, in the air and in Italy. It is not altogether a happy story. But, though the intelligence system was itself guilty of some wishful thinking, the blame would seem more closely to attach to the high command and, in particular, to the Prime Minister. As time and the process of

historical revision draw out, the Mediterranean campaign and Balkan entanglement come to look increasingly misjudged. To do something in 1943 was clearly essential, particularly as the Russians were doing so much — though quite what, the Allies often had to guess. "While the Russians continued to make frequent requests for information", the authors report rather wearily, "they still supplied little or nothing in return." It was anyhow — probably though not certainly — logistically impossible so to redeploy Allied strength from the Mediterranean to Britain as to make a cross-Channel invasion feasible in 1943. But, even given Allied wishful thinking, Russian secretiveness and German resilience, it does not seem necessary to have extended Allied commitments in the Mediterranean as far as they were during 1943. A disabling "Easternism" — to adduce a First World War concept — seems to have attacked British strategic judgment in the period under review. Italy, the Balkans and the Aegean islands were each made to assume the appearance of a military incubus about Germany's neck, in exactly the same way as were Turkey and the Salonika Front in 1915–16, and for reasons almost as bad.

As a result, the British were tempted into overselling their strategic conceptions to the Americans and even into undertaking operations that the Americans would not buy. The worst-judged of these was the recapture of the Dodecanese Islands, hitherto largely occupied by Italian garrisons, at the moment of the Italian armistice in September 1943. Intelligence from the area was scanty; but any cautious assessment of that gleaned should have warned that the balance of advantage lay with the Germans, who were irreducibly strong in the air. As a result, the campaign went wrong from the start, with the loss of Rhodes, the key to the archipelago. British persistence in occupying islands they were doomed to lose merely inflated the extent of their eventual humiliation. In Italy, the British, with the Americans,

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Thirty years after his death, Matisse has justifiably come to be regarded as one of the major painters in the history of art. This lavishly illustrated book, published to coincide with the major exhibition of his drawings and sculpture at the Hayward Gallery, London (4 October 1984 – 6 January 1985), presents all the latest findings on Matisse to enable a proper assessment of his art and artistic theory within a historical context.

This interesting, readable and lively book traces the origins and evolution of Matisse's life and work for everyone interested in this remarkable artist.

310 x 245 mm, 240 pp, 225 illustrations including 97 in colour

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Self-Portrait
1939

were so much stronger than the Germans – whose Italian allies fell away at the critical moment – that outright defeat was scarcely a prospect they feared. But the campaign might have gone wrong for them at the invasion stage, and certainly could have gone faster than it did. The German evacuation of Sicily, and the Salerno and Anzio landings, were the key episodes. What does the present volume tell us about them?

About the success of the Germans in getting their three high-grade divisions out of Sicily it not merely concedes but endorses the justice of the other official historians' condemnation of slowness at Mediterranean headquarters. The intelligence judgment was soggy and higher commanders did not act upon the clues provided. At Salerno, on the other hand, intelligence could yield little that affected the conduct of the battle; there it was the incisiveness of decision – the maligned Mark Clark's, as it happens – that turned the tide at the critical moment. Over Anzio, it was command rather than intelligence that failed. Intercepts provided an accurate picture of the reserves available to the Germans, but the Prime Minister and the Chiefs of Staff judged that Allied strength was sufficient to withstand the shock of their intervention. The judgment was wrong, and was compounded by tactical indecision once the Allied troops were ashore. As in the Dodecanese, the Germans displayed a quite remarkable ability to improvise, outthinking the Allies as much as they outfought them.

Indeed, their capacity for improvisation may be the key to explaining British misappreciation of the progress of the war at many levels during this period. The British stereotype of the German mind, after all, was of something powerful in logic but rigid in set – a stereotype fostered at Bletchley precisely by the German signal organization's persistence with Enigma in the teeth of evidence that it was compromised. We now know that the Germans constantly reviewed their signal security, but also that they were a deadly blind spot. But in other areas – as the Russians could have confirmed had they dealt openly with the Western Allies in the exchange of information – the Germans showed a positively creative ability to change and adapt. Their professional soldiers had always put what they called "operational" – i.e. reactive – capacity at the pinnacle of the gener-

al's art; some of them – notably Manstein – had shown improvisational genius in Russia. As their material superiority was eroded, their capacity to make a little go a long way, and quickly, became more and more pronounced. At Anzio they closed the ring around the bridgehead with "emergency battalions" farmed at Rome railway station from men returning from leave. In the Dodecanese they conjured up a local air force from squadrons drawn from all over southern Europe. At Messina they achieved their own "age of the little ships". And meanwhile at home in Germany they were remaking the structure of German industry to keep it safe from the hammer of Allied strategic bombing.

In Volume 2 the authors levelled strictures at the Ministry of Economic Warfare's groundless over-optimism in forecasting. In retrospect that may be judged to have been in part the effect of subjective factors; the Second World War was the first opportunity the relatively new profession of economist had had to apply its system of analysis directly to government policy. When applied to the equally inexact and novel strategy of strategic bombing, it is not surprising that its practitioners should have overestimated both the material results of the campaign and the indirect effects on the German economy to be extrapolated from it. It is very much to their credit, therefore, that during 1943–44 the economists of MEW made radical attempts to revise their estimates of how badly the German economy was hurting – as their colleagues in the US Strategic Bombing Survey might have put it. The answer was not very badly at all, thanks to the genius of Speer – not an economist – in dispersing manufacturing processes from the Ruhr to a complex of smaller engineering enterprises in central and southern Germany. At the end of the period under review, however, MEW estimates were still unrealistic, an anticipation of the influence of economic analysis on government policy perhaps as significant for the post-war years as it would be for the climactic strategic bombing in 1945.

Three other areas of strategic effort remain to be considered: the German pilotless weapons programme, Yugoslavia and the war at sea. The section on pilotless weapons is without question the most interesting in this volume, perhaps because it reviews how the whole arsenal of an intelligence system – signal intelligence (Sigint), human intelligence

(Humint), photographic interpretation (PR) and prisoner of war interrogation (POW) – fared against a programme protected by a security system designed to outwit it.

For once, the credit for penetrating the German security screen must go to the Secret Intelligence Service, rather than to Bletchley or the other agencies. Germany had located its pilotless weapons research station at Peenemünde, a remote Baltic peninsula, concentrated all activity there and eliminated radio reference to it. The mysterious "Oslo Report" of November 1939 had nevertheless alerted SIS to the existence of the V-1 and V-2 programme and it listened hard for more news thereafter. In August 1940 "a source in contact with Admiral Canaris" – the only reference to that ambiguous figure in this volume – pinpointed Peenemünde as significant, though after October 1940 no report was received for another two years. But SIS's attentiveness paid off. On December 18, 1942, a stock figure of spy fiction – "a chemical engineer who was travelling extensively on his firm's business" – overheard a conversation in a Berlin restaurant between two loose-tongued German technologists that put the game afoot again.

Its pace now quickened rapidly. A prisoner of war blabbed in January 1943. The captured Generals Crüwell and von Thoma talked indiscreetly to concealed microphones in March. In June photographic reconnaissance, intensive since January, at last revealed the presence of something that looked like a large missile at Peenemünde. By September over two hundred reports had been accumulated, of which 159 had been gathered by SIS, many of the preparation of launching sites on the northern coast of France.

For what sort of weapon still remained unclear. The Joint Intelligence Committee was bewildered by the truly revolutionary nature of the German V-weapons and by undifferentiated references to rockets (of unspecified size), pilotless aircraft, glider bombs and giant guns – all of which were indeed under development. It was also hindered by the informed scepticism of some scientists, notably Lord Cherwell, who had Churchill's ear and disbelieved fervently in the Germans' ability to construct a long-range rocket. When the separate existence of a flying bomb had been established, he disbelieved in that too, or at least in Germany's ability to manufacture it in quantity.

The deadliness of the threat, even should it

turn out to be the "more's the merrier" Churchill alleged it was, eventually came to count for more than the doubters' objections. Peenemünde, and the V-2 forward base at Watten in France, were effectively bombed in August 1943. So, too, in December were the French "ski sites" for the V-1. The War Cabinet felt that had gained a breathing space. The Germans, however, then displayed more of that fighting adaptiveness which was belling Allied amphibious and bombing strategy. Explosives and mobile launching apparatus for the V-1 and V-2 were substituted for large ramps, and even for concrete storage bases. During the spring of 1944 the V-weapons, as targets, effectively disappeared, while as weapons they became ever more tangible and threatening. Bletchley had supplied its first decryption of traffic connected with the V-weapons in August 1943 and during early 1944 was able to monitor reports which revealed the range, speed and operating altitude of the V-1 during many test flights. In March the flying bomb was observed in flight over the Baltic by the master of a Swedish freighter, who timed the pulsations of its jet engine by his chronometer, and passed the details to the naval attaché in Stockholm. And in July Polish collaborators of SIS were actually able to bring fragments of the V-2 rocket to London.

But by then the first flying bomb had landed on the capital, while the rocket bombardment was soon to start. The intelligence agencies, though they had eventually succeeded in forewarning the government of what lay in store, had therefore not made possible an effective pre-emption of the offensive, though – given the small compass needed for the manufacture of the V-weapons – the plants were probably not vulnerable targets.

It is illuminating to contrast how well intelligence served the war effort at sea. On the European land mass the Western Allies were still but intruders into a German area of control. On the oceans it was the other way about. By March 1943 the wolf packs had been driven into coastal waters, and despite every effort and adaptation tried by Dönitz, there they were kept throughout 1943–44. When they tried to move submerged to patrol stations, their routes were detected by Bletchley intercepts; and when they risked "fighting it out on the surface" they were massacred by Allied aircraft. The decryption of insecure cipher messages from the Japanese naval attaché in Berlin to Tokyo further revealed that Dönitz's new U-boat types, which would indeed have put his wolf packs on terms again with the convoys, would not be ready in time to interfere with the D-Day sailings, a relief for which the Admiralty could be inexpressibly thankful. The disabling of the Tirpitz and the sinking of the Scharnhorst, to both of which Bletchley – and SIS, which had an agent watching the former ship in close range – made major contributions, were by comparison almost minor blessings.

The war in Yugoslavia, which was to be a test case for SOE of the Prime Minister's charge to it "to set Europe ablaze", was in a preliminary stage during the period covered by this volume. SOE had nevertheless achieved its initial objects of securing a monopoly of responsibility for the campaign from SIS and of dumping Mihailovic. What was to follow will no doubt figure largely in the fourth and final instalment of the Hinsley history; though the authors' cautious reference to the "past literature" that has grown up on the subject suggests that even they may be weary of the effort of adjudicating between the different parties who claim to have controlled what was going on in those troubled mountains during 1941–5.

We need fear no weakness as they come to assess the contribution made by intelligence to the climactic phase of the war, when Germany's adaptability would at last face the West's industrial might across the "Invasion beaches". Ralph Bennett's *Ultra in the War* and M. R. D. Foot's *SOE in France* have already alerted us to the scale and importance of what intelligence then achieved. When the last page of that volume has been composed, there are, moreover, appendix compiled – there are, moreover, twenty-seven here – the last instalment of his exhaustive index entered, and will be written to one of the most important documents of the history of the Second World War, and to a triumph of official historiography.

Kinnock, Kinnock, who's there?

Ben Pimlott

ROBERT HARRIS
The Making of Neil Kinnock
256pp. Faber. £9.95 (paperback, £4.95).
0371 132669

G.M.F. DROWER
Neil Kinnock: The path to leadership
162pp. Weldenfeld and Nicolson. £8.95 (paperback, £5.95).
0287 785222

Since Neil Kinnock is likely to be around as Leader of the Opposition or Prime Minister until well into the next century, the sooner we find out about him the better. Yet there is a difficulty in writing "anticipatory" biography of the kind under review. The problem is not just that the history of a man without a past is dominated by present impressions. It is also that these impressions are in a state of flux. During the new Leader's first year – in which the mood of the Party has shifted from post-electoral shell-shock at Brighton to besieged defiance at Blackpool – perceptions of him have significantly altered. Hence the picture presented by both Robert Harris and G. M. F. Drower – not always intentionally – of a verbally fluent, genial lightweight already feels uncomfortably dated.

Both these books are diligent, fair and interesting. Both, however, suffer from the difficulty that so far there is not a great deal to be said. As the titles imply, they cover much the same ground. Of the two, Harris wins decisively on points. He is the better writer, his characterization is more subtle, and he gives to his account the shape, and something of the pace, of a thriller. Much of what he says is based on conversations with Kinnock's colleagues and enemies, and he has spent valuable time in South Wales digging at the Party Leader's grass roots. Drower relies mainly on newspaper clippings, and as a result gives too much importance to his routine statements to the press of a kind that politicians shove out every night before brushing their teeth. Neither book is "authorized", and both seek to show their subject in a different light. Both writers, however, obtained interviews with Kinnock himself, and Harris in particular makes extensive use of material gained thereby. This is understandable, but a mistake. The portraits might have been sharper, with fewer pouches pulled, if there had been a sense of obligation. Politically, both books are rather blandly uncommitted.

There is little disagreement about the facts of their interpretation. Central to each account, as to the Party Leader's own self-image, is his ordinariness. The theme is well-established: likely to come from a Welsh mining village – based at work, good at games – shows no special aptitude until his early twenties. Then a mixture of talent, guts and fate raises him aloft. Both agree that it was Cardiff University and the rough-house of the students' union that set him on. Meetings were held at lunch time: it was here that, with his future wife Glynis as ally, he learnt to raise his voice above the din of the caoteo. He campaigned for left-wing causes, became student president, and flunked his exams. He got a pass degree at his second attempt. "I just permitted myself to be distracted", he admits, "by sport or debates, or politics or going to the cinema in the afternoon".

What turned a B-stream "lazy sod" (a friend's description) at grammar school into a high flyer? Both writers mention Kinnock's youthful enthusiasm for Aneurin Bevan, and the history of unemployment and industrial injury in his own family. Rivrality rather than seriousness, however, characterized Kinnock's postgraduate undergraduate career. "I've been fortunate", Kinnock claims, "in that I've never suffered from personal ambition." His biographers rightly disbelieve him. Yet the lift-off of the average student at an average university (as Drower calls him) is not closely examined, and the mystery of his motivations remains unsolved.

His rise to succeed was certainly sharp. Having left university, Kinnock moved fast. He took his first and only pre-parliamentary job at twenty-four, as a tutor for the WEA. Three years later, he was selected as Labour candidate for one of the safest seats in the

United Kingdom, and a year after that he was in Parliament. Future Party Leaders usually start young. Several – Churchill, Eden, Home and Wilson – have, like Kinnock, become MPs before the age of thirty. No Leader in this century, however, has had so brief an experience of the world of work outside Westminster. Nor has any politician, once elected, travelled so quickly to the top of his party. What was Kinnock's secret? Both authors stress his speaking ability and his charm. Then, somewhat at a loss, they turn to luck. Kinnock, they say, was born lucky. Even when his car somersaulted off the motorway with him inside, divine intervention was at hand to save him. "Someone up there likes me", said Kinnock at the time. Harris agrees. This remark, he suggests, not only summed up a miraculous escape, "it also seemed to sum up Kinnock's entire career".

To say that Kinnock's career has been lucky, however, is a way of avoiding the need for explanation. If Kinnock has had a habit of being in the right place at the right time, this has been because he has put himself there. Indeed in his first years in Parliament he showed a formidable ability to create his own opportunities. Thus, principle and self-advancement were judiciously combined during the 1974–79 Parliament when Kinnock opted for backbench independence, and refused offers of a junior ministerial post. It was in these years that he made his name with a series of well-targeted attacks on the government's managerial drift, and – in particular – with a brilliantly effective assault on plans for Welsh devolution. Courage or far-sightedness? Arguably, both. There were many other Labour MPs, easily tempted by office, who have since vanished without trace. Staying his ground, and accepting the disapproval of the Cabinet hierarchy, Kinnock was also building himself a Labour Party base.

According to Harris, a witty speech at a Tribune rally during the 1975 Party Conference was the turning-point of his career. "He went a bomb", says Joe Ashton, a fellow MP. "He was the star of the show. And there were 500 constituency votes in that audience." Standing for the Party Executive the following year, he picked up more than 150 of them. In 1978 he was elected to the Party Executive, second only to Benn in the constituency parties section. The reason? "There were few MPs attacking the Government as vociferously as he was", suggests Harris. It was Kinnock's perception of the widening gap between the government and its active supporters, and his energy in capitalizing on the split, that turned him into a leading politician. Though he criticized ministers in Parliament, Parliament was

by no means the main focus of his interest. Harris has done a count. In his first year as an MP, Kinnock voted in nine divisions out of ten: by 1982 he had one of the worst attendance records of any Member. "I've always considered that speaking around the country is an important part of being a Labour MP", he says, disarmingly. "You're a full-time, paid political activist".

Before the 1979 general election, Kinnock may have had long-distance hopes, but he cannot have anticipated the speed of his elevation. Callaghan was still in charge. Healey the heir apparent. After Labour's defeat, three developments put Kinnock in the centre of the stage: first, his own determination, having accepted the shadow education portfolio, to resist the demands of former allies on the Left; second, the surprise election of Foot as Leader, making another contest in the near future likely, with a good chance that the Party would go for a younger man; and third, the constitutional upheaval which gave the PLP a mere 30 per cent of the total vote in the new electoral college, and ensured that MPs would live in terror of their (usually left-wing) general management committees.

Like three predecessors (Attlee, Wilson, Foot), Kinnock gained the Leadership while moving from the Left toward the middle ground. In 1978, the press had called Kinnock an extremist and a fanatic. After 1979, he appeared, in media terms, a member of the "sensible" Left. There was his refusal, despite strong pressure, to pledge Labour to restore Tory education cuts in full. There were his views on Arthur Scargill ("He's destroying the coal industry single-handed") and on Militants ("They once stuck a dead rat and a used sanitary towel through my door"). There was his opposition to Benn in the Deputy Leadership contest ("I thought we needed a contest like we needed bubonic plague"). By 1982, some of his former friends were calling him "Judas".

At the time it was tough for Kinnock, and he risked losing his NEC seat as a reprisal. In the long term – as his detractors point out – he had much to gain. If there was bitterness against the Right after the 1979 poll for betrayals in government, there were likely to be recriminations against the far Left after the subsequent election, once it had been soundly lost. The Party Leadership, moreover, would once more be on the market. So it proved. Even before the election had taken place, the fight for Foot's succession had begun. At one of Kinnock's meetings, a heckler shouted: "Mrs Thatcher's got guts". Kinnock replied, in the best one-liner of the whole miserable, humbug-ridden campaign: "And it's a pity that other people had to

reminds us had since 1944 been a predominant right-wing-led area.

The special relationship between the miners and the Labour party has rarely been in doubt since Ramsay MacDonald described the 1918 PLP as a "party of checkweighmen". Taylor argues, however, that even before the war, as miners' MPs resolved Westminster and realized that there was a world beyond the pithead, this relationship became more a matter of form than substance. He shows how the Yorkshire NUM's headquarters ("The Tammany Hall in Huddersfield Road"), as it was described in the ever lively correspondence columns of the *Barnsley Chronicle* used its influence in the constituencies in the 1930s and 60s. He also describes the strains on the mutual loyalty between miners and their MPs during the Labour administrations of the 60s and 70s, which culminated in the Yorkshire leadership being criticized by the committee of privileges in 1975 for attempting to dictate policy. But the account is curiously incomplete. Taylor describes in some detail the selection of the twenty-eight-year-old Roy Mason as MP to Barnsley, but he doesn't even mention the machinations within the constituency against him after 1979.

He fails to do justice of the uneasy co-existence of a left-wing area leadership and a right-wing group of Labour MPs.

The book started as a PhD thesis, and that may explain why the material painstakingly examined by Taylor sometimes seems only half

leave theirs on the ground at Goose Green in order to prove it." Far from being a "major political blunder", as Drower suggests, this remark helped to make Kinnock front runner when a few weeks later, Foot resigned as Leader. Two factors determined the outcome: Benn's general election defeat in Bristol, which pushed him out of the race; and the trade unions. In the event, the trade unions went quickly and massively for Kinnock. Deprived of a serious left-wing alternative, the constituency parties followed suit. Battered MPs, relieved not to be offered anybody more frightening, fell into line. There was no bandwagon. The battle was no sooner joined than won.

What, from these two books, can we learn about Kinnock as a man? That he is emotional, impulsive, voluble, funny, informal. That he is gregarious, naturally egalitarian and hates privilege. That – at his best – he is an outstanding stump orator. That he is likeable and straightforward, acute without being devious. That he is a middle-brow, closer to Attlee and Callaghan than to Gaitskill, Wilson or Foot. Drower calls him a meritocrat. The term is inappropriate. Kinnock is untested. He has no area of expertise, and no experience of administration. He has climbed no promotional ladder. He has made his way, instead, on the basis of a sixth sense for the labour movement and its nuances, an instinct for its values and a keen judgment of its byzantine procedures. He is good with middle-class socialists, to whom he speaks the language of the student debating chamber. He is even better with trade unionists, who feel that he is one of them. He is best of all in working men's clubs. Pretty wife, rugged fanaticism, frequent use of "bloody" in off-the-cuff exchanges, give him a rank-and-file macho with which no other post-war Leader has been equipped.

In style and rhetoric, like his hero Aneurin Bevan, he is a product of Methodist halls and an ancient tradition of Celtic Independent Labour Party evangelism. Yet he is also a break with the past. Gaitskill, Wilson, Callaghan, Foot – all four of his immediate predecessors – entered the Commons in 1945. First elected a quarter of a century later, Kinnock skips not one political generation but two. As an MP, he knows nothing of Clypsian austerity or Wilsonian pursuit of growth, or of the years of so-called "consensus". Michael Foot spent his youth attacking Neville Chamberlain; for Kinnock, the enemy was Lyndon Johnson. In spirit, like many of his entourage, he still belongs to the anti-Vietnam war, anti-authority, campus power 1960. Already he has presided, with considerable assurance though not without criticism, over a restoration of balance and unity in the Labour Party.

digested. For there is something missing, too, from his account of the growth of industrial militancy in Yorkshire. Up to the mid-1960s the only one of Yorkshire's four semi-official "panels" of NUM activists to be dominated by the Left was that based in Doncaster and led by Owen Briscoe, the present Yorkshire secretary. Yet by the end of 1969 this situation had been transformed. In the process, and in the important strike over surface workers' hours, Scargill's personality and ambition must have played an important part, yet Taylor gives us little insight into it. He somewhat woodenly observes that Scargill's prominence in leading the flying pickets from Barnsley in the 1972 strike propelled him into the job of compensation agent a year later. But what of the previous years? Taylor makes two tantalizing mentions of the Barnsley Miners' Forum, the unofficial body which helped to spread militant ideas across the coalfield. And there is the occasional reference to militant resolutions from Scargill's home branch of Wooley – like the 1971 wages resolution which Taylor accepts as the "casus belli" of the 1972 strike; but there is precious little sense of the human forces which lay behind these developments.

The revised edition of *Theories of Trade Unionism: A sociology of industrial relations* by Michael Poole (265pp. Routledge. £7.95. 0 7102 0020 X), first published in 1981, has recently been released into paperback.

Keeping them dropping

Brian Bond

CHARLES MESSENGER
Bomber Harris and the Strategic Bombing Offensive, 1939–1945
244pp. Arima and Armour Press. £12.95.
085368 6777

In the course of the Second World War Bomber Command carried out approximately 300,000 sorties by night and 67,000 by day, dropped almost 1,000,000 tons of bombs and caused about 800,000 fatal casualties. The price paid was very great: more than 8,000 bombers were lost during operational sorties, and more than 46,000 airmen lost their lives. Out of every one hundred airmen who joined an Operational Training Unit it was calculated that only twenty-four would survive unharmed – the worst odds in any branch of the fighting services. The conception and execution of the RAF's strategic bombing campaign, both in terms of cost-effectiveness and morality, have always been controversial, and there is no end in sight to the literary war of attrition.

Charles Messenger has been unlucky in the timing of his study in that Sir Arthur Harris's recent death made possible the publication of Dudley Seward's official biography which naturally gained more public attention. Messenger disclaims any intention of writing a rival biography, but it must be said that Harris's personality, opinions and responsibilities loom very large indeed. The author does however stake a largely convincing claim to have presented a dispassionate picture of Harris and the strategic bombing campaign. This is a welcome contrast to much recent writing on the subject

in which emotions of loyalty or indignation are more in evidence than historical understanding or careful documentation. Indeed Messenger's detailed narrative, neatly arranged in ten chapters, taking the bomber offensive from the early frustrations and the switch to night bombing, via the development of new technical aids and the Pathfinder concept, to the battles of Berlin, Hamburg and Dresden, can be warmly recommended as an introductory survey for new readers. He is particularly successful in showing the irritating effects of Harris's prickly character and stubborn adherence to the strategy of area bombing even on men who were basically supporters such as Churchill and Portal. As late as December 1944, for example, Harris was still describing all targets as "a panacea" and devoted less than 8 per cent of that month's sorties to them. There are some choice quotations on inter-service rivalry. Just before Overlord, for example, Alan Brooke noted, "Bert Harris told us how well he might have won the war if it had not been for the handicap imposed by the other two Services." Earlier, in December 1942, one admiral wrote to another, "Our fight with the Air Ministry becomes more and more fierce as the war proceeds. It is very much more savage than our war with the Huns."

For readers more familiar with the main points of controversy it is a little disappointing, particularly in view of the new evidence available since the publication of Webster and Frankland's magisterial *Official History*. In 1961, that the author has not attempted a more systematic scholarly analysis, or presented forthright conclusions.

Critical topics which are touched upon but not sufficiently isolated from the narrative in-

clude: British Intelligence regarding Bomber Command's material effects and German counter-measures; the controversy over target priorities; and Harris's relations with the Air Ministry, the Chief of Air Staff and the War Cabinet.

Where he misses a real opportunity to break fresh ground concerns the topics of the wartime controversy over the morality of bombing and the problem of low morale among aircrew referred to as "Lack of Moral Fibre" (or LMF). Perhaps in a study focused on Harris and Bomber Command it would be unreasonable to expect more than a passing reference to the moral objections of Bishop Bell or Liddell Hart, but the LMF issue surely merited more attention than a tantalizing page or two.

The final chapter, "The Reckoning", provides a concise and fair summing-up of the main areas of controversy. Messenger demonstrates that, contrary to the prevalent myth, Harris was not snubbed by Churchill or deprived of honours which he might reasonably have expected in the immediate aftermath of war. In summing up the moral dilemma he wisely quotes Frankland: "I think that the big moral question is whether you will fight at all. If you will, I think one's proper duty is to win as quickly and cheaply as possible." Whether or not the bomber offensive actually fulfilled these conditions is left unresolved. On the last page we read that in retrospect Harris's rigid adherence to the concept of area bombing was a mistake, but at the same time Harris is praised, especially in his dogged upholding of that principle of war, maintenance of the aim, and his ability to inspire those under him to carry it out.

Driven to destruction

T. O. Treadwell

TOM SHARPE
Wilt on High
236pp. Secker and Warburg. £8.95.
04364581 X

This is the third instalment in the chronicle of the hapless Henry Wilt, and the many readers to whom *Wilt* (1976) and *The Wilt Alternative* (1979) gave pleasure will welcome the return of Tom Sharpe's accident-prone hero, still a sane and rational voice in a nightmarishly comic universe of stupidity, greed and malevolent coincidence.

Wilt is now forty-three and head of the Department of Communication Skills and Expressive Attainment (formerly Liberal Studies) at Fenland Tech in Ipsford, the lightly-disguised Cambridge where all three novels are set. His wife, the dim-witted but energetic Eva, is still fretting at Wilt's sexual apathy and his quad daughters, ghoulisher than ever now that they have been sent to a prodigiously expensive school for gifted children by their dotting mother, have electrified the latch on the garden gate and invented a computerized telephone answering machine that advises incoming callers to fuck off.

The world of the Wilt novels has darkened. The violence in *Wilt* consisted largely of Henry's fantasies of uxoricide, and though a domestic murder is attempted in that novel it is prevented by farcical fate in the person of a sozzled clergyman. *The Wilt Alternative* has mindlessly vicious political terrorism as the mainspring of its plot and a villainess who is a coldly-beautiful multiple murderer, but though the bullets fly nobody in the novel is actually killed.

The complications in *Wilt on High*, by contrast, begin with the discovery of the body of a student at the Tech, dead from an overdose of heroin laced with PCP (the novel's title has multiple meanings, but the drug allusion is paramount), and this is not the only fatality. One time or another, Wilt's old adversary, Inspector Flint of the Ipsford constabulary, has been removed from the drug squad, largely because his own son is doing a five-year stretch for smuggling cocaine, and his replacement, the obtusely unscrupulous Inspector Hodge, decides that Wilt is the criminal genius at the heart of the local narcotics network and undertakes a programme of non-stop surveillance.

Wilt, meanwhile, has other problems, and these, as in *The Wilt Alternative*, centre on his member. In an effort to perk Henry up, Eva has sought the help of the sinister Dr Kores, a vaguely germanic man-hater from the Animal Husbandry Department of the University who runs a clinic for women with problems, which means prescribing their husbands inadequately tested and powerful drugs. Under her influence, Eva introduces a substance originally designed to ginger-up pigs into Wilt's home-brewed lager; he unwittingly ingests six times the recommended dose and rapidly develops a more-or-less permanent erection.

Good farce combines the maximum of activity with the minimum of comprehension on the part of the actors. Wilt, who asks only to pursue the noiseless tenor of his ways, is subjected by his creator to a beating from a female PE instructor, threats from a vicious criminal, harassment by corrupt and stupid policemen and violent interrogation by the security service of the US Air Force, all for malfeasances of which he is either innocent or ignorant, and bearing an insistently rampant phallus before him the while. In a world of moral and mental pats he is humiliated and betrayed – but in the end, as in the earlier novels, he triumphs. "I'm just mister sick-in-the-middle who doesn't know which way to jump," Wilt tells Eva at one particularly fraught moment. "But my God I do think!" It is Wilt's independence of mind that sees him through; by the end of the novel he is able to reflect with satisfaction that he is, finally, no one's victim.

Independence is a rare commodity in *Wilt on High*; most of the characters are zombies, driven if not literally by drugs, then by the narcolepsy of ambition, selfishness, or a blind obedience to authority which, as Wilt's experience with the American military teaches him,

threatens to destroy the world. Only the banal bloody-mindedness of ordinary men and women stands in the way of Armageddon, and there isn't very much of it left.

As the themes of *Wilt on High* are blacker than those of the earlier novels in the series, so the humour is more savage. Old friends like the sardonic Dr Board and his jargon-ridden antagonist Dr Mayfield return, but only perfunctorily, and the novel contains far less genial monsters – Lord Lynchknowle, for example, who won't allow the news of his daughter's death by overdose to come between him and his Lafite 1962 and game pie. The awful Wilt quads are a rich source of comedy, but there are fewer of the great bravura scenes that made the earlier books such a pleasure. More worryingly, *Wilt on High* is less tightly plotted than the earlier novels in the series; a number of promising characters and episodes are introduced but then forgotten, and there are patches of loose writing – characters eye one another with loathing rather too often, for example.

A bleak moral vision often underlies effective farce, and *Wilt on High* has much to enjoy as well as something serious to say, but readers who come to the novel expecting the wild hilarity of Sharpe's previous Wilt stories are likely to be disappointed.

Superman souped up

John Rosselli

GEORGE MACBETH
The Lion of Pescara
256pp. Cape. £8.95.
0224022490

It is no doubt poetic justice that Gabriela D'Annunzio, an intermittently great poet whose life was one vast advertisement for himself as lover and superman, should now be the subject of a novel in which his erotomania and swashbuckling stand out and his lyric gift gets little more than a passing mention. D'Annunzio's own novels, specialized in what, around the turn of the century, was reckoned sordid physical detail: and here he is, ensnared in a novel a prominent part of whose burden is his alleged fixation on oral sex and senile defecation into coprophagy, abetted by a girl of eleven.

The "total recreation of life as a kind of macabre or violent art", here ascribed to one of his followers, was not far from D'Annunzio's own aim in his "transit from action to action", particularly after he had found himself in 1915 as an authentically daring soldier-aerialist, and, with the march on Fiume in 1919, as the sometime ruler of a utopia compounded of nationalism, syndicalism and carnival. George MacBeth sets out to write a novel soaked in the D'Annunzian phantasmagoria yet distanced by an irony to which the *Commendante* seldom gave way. The result is a curious, often uneasy amalgam. *The Lion of Pescara* does sustain over a good many of its pages an *ombance* of lush grotesquerie; yet it stumbles again and again, sometimes over the need to soup things up for the jaded late twentieth-century book-buyer, more often over the inflexibility of the data – for this is after all a chase after that awkward quarry a "real person".

The book opens in 1916 with the middle-aged D'Annunzio temporarily blinded, writing his autobiographical prose poem *Nocturno* on ten thousand cards in a house in Venice where every clock tells a different time. It makes forays into the poet's past, his love affairs with Eleonora Duse and many others, his flight to France from his creditors, his exploits in helping to bring Italy into the war and in fighting it. It then moves forward to narrate in chronological order the rest of D'Annunzio's life – the Fiume expedition, the uneasy dealings with the rising Mussolini, and the last years when the poet, now Prince of Monte Nevoso, spent creating an extravagant mausoleum for himself in a villa by Lake Garda with a naval cruiser built into the hillside.

The narrator is D'Annunzio's long-serving secretary Tomaso Antonini, who occasionally acts as a channel for D'Annunzio himself or for another reporter. At first sight Tomaso looks like the deliberately neutral (even neutered) storyteller of historical novels such as *Count*

Mauvais goo in old Havana

John Butt

GUILLERMO CABRERA INFANTE
Infante's Inferno
Translated by Suzanne J. Levine
410pp. Faber. £9.95.
0571 13292 8

The Spanish languages are many and varied, and every Hispanic country has its cockney and provincial, as well as its educated standard. At one extreme are the impenetrable street jargons of Buenos Aires, Caracas or Madrid; at the other the irreconcilables in the moribund *Academia* pretending that the language remains essentially the same as St Teresa's. Somewhere between is a mid-Atlantic literary Koine, which can be studied at its lifeless worst in Radio Moscow newscasts or in *Selecciones del Reader's Digest*, and which at its best has a certain ponderous Latinity which skilled writers like Juan Goytisolo, Martín Santes, José Donoso, Alejo Carpentier and Julio Cortázar have satirized or parodied in subtle and effective ways, but which does not easily create the illusion of casual speech. García Márquez said that he avoided dialogue in his novels because it never sounds convincing in Spanish, and

characters in Hispanic novels, and even plays, often seem to talk like books.

It may be impossible to bridge the gap between living Spanish speech and writing without forgoing the ideal of a single language. The size of the problem is clear in the novel of Cabrera Infante, who in *Tres tristes tigres* (1965) set about what he recognized as the difficult job of transcribing Havana Spanish with the warning that "some pages are better heard than read". The result was a language ungrammatical and bastardized, but so vivid that it made an unanswerable case against the remoteness of literary Spanish, and proved that the language of Cervantes was still alive and growing even where Hispanic civilization had succumbed to fast food and sex shops.

Tres tristes tigres revealed the author's linguistic awareness; in *Infante's Inferno* that awareness has become acute glossomania. The novel has two themes, language and sex, both pushed about as far as they can go. The Spanish original (*La Habana para un infante difunto*, 1979) reads as if made of words which, far too much coexisting, have grown out of control and become less a medium for saying things than a sort of exotic carnival din. The married author is in love with Havana idiom ("so vulgar", the hero says, "so alive, and I miss it"). But as well as a linguist he is also a punner, and the result is a prose so overblown, empuerped and word-bound, so madly alliterative, so riddled with groan-making puns of the sort that would clear a taproom in seconds, that the book is what the narrator, in his inimitable way, would probably call a manual of mauvais goo.

Some of the entries in this compendium of low wit are memorable ("Please come and visit us soon. My husband is so moody and I miss him, a sodomite"). A few are just tolerable if you are in the mood ("Sick transit, Gloria Swanson"). But most are plain verbal dexterity ("I caressed both breasts. Udder joy," "she was a sphincter without a secret"), the totally tacit temptation of Tiny Tim's plea of translation problems or poor English cannot be entered in mitigation of these wit crimes, because it is clear that Suzanne Levine and the author cold-bloodedly and premeditatedly every wicked act. But the narrator makes his case: "Nothing please me more than vulgar sentiments, vulgar expressions, vulgarity itself . . . After all, I'm not writing a history of culture, but rather putting vulgarity in its place – which is close to my art."

The story, of a young erotomane's initiation in ancient régime Havana, is in the same spirit as the hilarious catalogue of what he calls *coups de foudre*, though his machisme is undermined by his tendency to be distracted on the job by some lexical oddity or phonetic quirk of his partner, or by the chance of a quick pun. The picture of pre-Revolutionary Havana corresponds to the Intercapitalist Sodom and Gomorrah of Castro's lore, except that the street walkers are in a screen and life is fun and amazingly free. But there is a deafening silence about what came after which must make us read this celebration of old Havana as a constant on the new. Just as Havana is now a dead language (or language of the dead) gone with the hurricane of history hurrying over cane fields, gone too are the dives and cabarets, turned over to creches, literacy centres or houses of Soviet-Cuban friendship, the go-go girls now ageing in Miami or getting abandoned to high-mindedness and socialist endeavour. You feel that every dirty joke and every triumphant conjugation is really an unspoken indictment of the dreary Castro world to come.

It is good that this Caribbean Alexandria has its Durrell. It is also true that a few days of Eastern-bloc "culture" can convince westerners that where there is no pornography there is no freedom, but the argument is of uncertain efficacy and best suppressed. Anyway, the hero confesses that "I was young then and the young always blow everything out of proportion", so we can go on suspecting that this novel of "La plégia nel pinato" would have minded the failure of artistic unity

After such a dropping of researcher's notes the mixture of authentic and made-up quotations, the frequent misspelling of proper names, and the peppering of minor inaccuracies and anachronisms (Mussolini hung up in the wrong square; a male secretary in 1915 automatically suspected of homosexual relations with his employer; Italian audiences said to "rustle chocolates" – almost the only noise Italian audiences have never been known to make), all this, which might have suggested a deliberate alienating device, merely puzzles when it does not look like scamped homework. D'Annunzio the slogger of blood and death might have shrugged off the inaccuracy; the author of "La plégia nel pinato" would have minded the failure of artistic unity

The Translator's Association will award five prizes for translations into English of a short story from French, German, Spanish, Italian

The nobody's unnoticeable nipple

Peter Kemp

CHRISTOPHER PRIEST
The Glamour
303pp. Cape. £8.50.
022402274 1

The Glamour is a book about invisibility in which it is increasingly hard to see what the author is getting at. The novel opens in what looks like familiar mystery-fiction territory: its main character, Richard Grey, has been afflicted with amnesia after being caught in a car-bomb explosion. When the story starts, he's in a convalescent hospital where – as Priest recounts in his usual concise and precise prose – he makes gingerly efforts to regain his physical stability and to re-assert control over his memory.

Though Grey has been a cameraman, professionally given to the creation of images, he finds he's unable to come up with any that might illuminate his blankness about the months before his accident. Then, out of cloudy weather – "there was a dulling haze ever everything" – and the mists of his past emerges an ex-girlfriend, Sue, claiming to have played a major role in his life during these weeks that have been left a crater of oblivion by the bomb.

Grey's strong, but ambivalent, response to her galvanizes him into stepping up his attempts to overcome his amnesia. He allows two doctors to try to dispel it by hypnosis – with

unexpected results: coming round from his session of induced unconsciousness, he senses that something out of the ordinary has happened. Later it is revealed that, during his trance, he disappeared from the doctors' sight.

This brings emphatically into view the book's central concern: one that subsequent sections – allocated to different narrators, some first-person, some third – push Grey ever closer to perceiving. Invisibility, it materializes, is the real bond he shares with Sue. During their affair in the weeks leading to his injury, she has gradually revealed to him that there's more – or less – to her than meets the eye. From childhood onwards, she has known that she possesses "the glamour", an ability to make herself invisible, and on moving to London has found that there are hordes of people like her, some of them permanently invisible to all scrutiny but that of other "glams", as they term themselves. Most of the "glamorous" gang don't, it seems, live up to the usual connotation of their label, being dirty, disturbed, and prone to dental problems arising from understandable difficulties in getting their teeth looked at. Among them, though, Sue has encountered one who is fully glamorous, Niall, a would-be writer, totally immersed in invisibility. Soon, he's immersed in Sue, too; and reacts with possessive fury when she leaves him for Grey, whom she's recognized as "incipiently glamorous".

In earlier work such as *A Dream of Wessers* or some of his "Dream Archipelago" stories, Priest achieved powerful and disorientating

blends of the occult and the obsessive. Here, the mixture is more run than potent. To illuminate his notion of invisibility, he tries out a plethora of hypotheses. Hypnosis figures prominently, with talk of "negative induced hallucination": "perhaps it was possible that some people had the unconscious ability to hypnotize people around them so they could not be seen". Amnesia also supplies woody analogies. On a less clinical level, outlandishly mundane explanations of the phenomenon are forthcoming. Perhaps Sue – once almost incinerated when her father lit the fire without noticing her bending over it – became invisible to her parents because of "failure of vision of another kind: an inability to see her growing up and changing". Many "glams", it's intimated, are nobodies who've taken their status to a logical conclusion by disappearing from view.

Earnest, somewhat sociological notes of this kind give an odd ring to many of the book's sections. Accounts of the "shadow world" of the "glams" – as opposed to that of "fleshers" – are couched in terms curiously reminiscent of old-fashioned documentaries on "social deviants". Being transparent, it often appears, can raise the same problems as being transvestite or transsexual. At other times, Priest's glum glams seem like figures from some inglorious pre-Wolfenden commentary on homoerotics: nervy loners susceptible to VD and wistfully scornful of normality, they lead dismal lives, rarely coming out of their invisibility except to congregate morosely in special pubs among their half-resented kind.

Haunted by Hardy

Alan Franks

HOWARD JACOBSON
Peeping Tom
265pp. Chatto and Windus/The Hogarth Press. £8.95.
070112908 5

Let us dispense with the first mystery, even if it means confronting several more. The Peeping Tom of the title is the adolescent Thomas Hardy, standing outside Dorchester Prison one Saturday in 1856, watching the fresh corpse of young Martha Brown, the husband-killer, twist slowly at the end of the gallows rope in the rain.

But there is a second, and mutual form of voyeurism in play, whereby the novelist's shade appears to have taken up residence in the corporeal frame of our and Howard Jacobson's hero, Barney Fugleman. The Tem that once peeped at the strangely erotic death-gyration of the girl has now seeped across the century and found a flesh-home in a troubled, randy and ever-articulate young Jew. In Finchley, where else?

Not that Barney himself is too put out by his act of possession. For one thing, it only manifests itself when he is under the influence of Harry Vilbert's regressive, hypnosis. For another, it is his partner, the aggressively sexual Sharon, proprietor of a shop tradelog to Harlequin, who seems to get the kicks and the kudos from Tom's spiritual reincarnation.

Where to go from here? Is this the cue for an exploration of the paranormal, or for a revisionist critique of Hardy and his novels? Both, and neither. It is rather an exquisitely paved blind alley, the tramping of which is but one of many devices that ensnare Jacobson to address himself to the main preoccupation of a very complex novel – that is, an individual's gradual self-release from the accretions of genealogy, cultural or familial.

With the same fictive parentage, Fugleman cannot help but be the sibling of Sefron Goldberg, hero of Jacobson's first novel, *Coming From Behind*. Both are patently the elphers of autobiography; but things have changed. The jealousy which so consumed Goldberg as he founded, knee-deep in a rotting Midlands polytechnic, has now been transformed into the very stuff of libido. For Fugleman, sexual gratification is not married but quenched by the success of a rival for the same woman's bed. Which brings us back to the loathed figure of Hardy, who by the end of the first half has

come to loom over Fugleman's doings like a disabling forebear. "The daemon, you see", says Camilla, Fugleman's second wife, to her tourist class at the Hardy summer school in Cornwall,

must be free to watch and feel the pain himself. The seduction of Bathsheba, the rape of Tess, the subjugation of Elfrida, are all observed as by an injured third party, jealously. And the more assured the rival's mastery, that's to say, the more complete the woman's surrender, then the more exquisite the sense of injury . . . Hardy was using his novels to have the women he loved, real or imaginary – it comes to the same thing – violated by proxy.

Barney's activities in this quarter are less cerebral by far than those of his unthought model, and they give rise (I use the word advisedly) to some telling sexual farce – very funny, but at the same time shot through with the tender passions of self-discovery. Jacobson's triumph is to stalk the high comedy which in turn stalks the erotic (and vice versa) and to make the one lance the other at the point of climax.

There is a second "secular" counterpart to the Hardy theme, a brilliantly evoked amorous quadrille between Barney's parents and the neighbouring couple, the Flatmans (Mrs F. having once been the object of his own pubescent fantasies), at the end of which it transpires that he sprang not from the Fugleman, but from the Flatman womb. All those years he had been fancying his own mother. Olney! Not only is he being pulled apart by a stiff Victorian, but now his own flesh and blood are weighing in with fresh ambiguities.

Fugleman, what's in a name? Whether or not Jacobson intended the irony, it's there plainly enough. For Barney starts out by being the very reverse of a regimental exemplar – more fugue than Fugleman – dragged along as a passive variation behind the primary melodies of others. Not until the very end does he, turn the tables on his dead and living legacies as, in a memorable seascape scene, he consigns an unopened letter, the last token of a dead relationship, to the cliff breezes, "floating down with a rocking motion into the opal and the sapphire of that wandering western sea".

This is more than fleshly valediction. It is a last, trumpeting dismissal of a dead man for whom the note unread and the message gone astray were the stock-in-trade of human frailty.

With this novel, as with *Coming From Behind*, the style is the thing. Jacobson is incapable of concocting an unbalanced sentence or a short-changing apophysis. The whole book rings with a justifiable tenacity, and the Book or shortlist (which it missed by a whisker) is the lesser for its absence.

Strong-shouldered

Peter Lewis

JOHN HALE
The Whistle Blower
239pp. Cape. £8.50.
0224 2257 1

Novelists who operate in or near the journalistic zone of the fiction spectrum thrive on topicality, and John Hale's eighth novel is nothing if not topical. In the first place, *The Whistle Blower* is very much an angry novel for 1984, the scattered references to Orwell drawing attention to what Hale sees as the disturbing resemblances between Britain today and the vision of 1984 itself. For Hale, Britain may present the illusion of an open society, but under it he locates creeping totalitarianism, layers of conspiratorial secrecy within the Establishment, and officially sanctioned machiavellianism devoted to preserving the status quo at any cost.

Hale's title is a slang phrase for someone who leaks secret information to the press and the public, in this case about the unacceptable, hidden face of national security, especially the activities of largely self-monitoring intelligence services. The would-be whistle blower, Bob Jones, is a specialist on Russian affairs at GCHQ in Cheltenham, an institution that has recently received plenty of adverse publicity, partly because of the Prime case. Hale only touches on this real-life spy scandal, but develops at length a fictional parallel involving a GCHQ mathematician and Soviet mole, Dodgson, who is beginning a long prison sentence for his treachery. Increasingly aware that he is a cog in an amoral and American-dominated machine, supposedly existing to uphold a decent, liberal, democratic way of life but often resorting to the most obnoxious of methods, Bob Jones has decided to defy the Official Secrets Act and reveal what he knows about the ghastly hypocrisy of the whole enterprise. Before he can do so, he is "eliminated with extreme prejudice" (to use CIA jargon) by his own country's security service, but in such a way as to make his death look like suicide or an accident.

The novel opens with Bob's father Frank being informed of his son's death, and the main narrative describes Frank's determined effort to discover what happened to Bob and why, culminating in his decision to take over the role of whistle blower himself. The underlying pattern is that of an individual's struggle against external authority or the state. Especially in the early stages, there are frequent flashbacks

to crucial conversations between father and son, and Frank's quest is also intercut with the interrogation of Dodgson by British intelligence in conjunction with a CIA polygraph expert. The climax of this sub-plot is the successful conclusion of an elaborate, ingenious yet morally dubious plan of double and triple bluff to obtain from Dodgson the names of his two fellow-traitors at GCHQ without his realizing that he has betrayed them.

Frank, a small businessman of unimpeachable patriotism who used to support Labour but has drifted to the right, epitomizes Middle England; even his superficial contact with the world of intelligence makes him aware of the frightening contradictions in the Western ideology he has unconsciously assumed in the past. Although *The Whistle Blower* draws on the conventions of both the spy thriller and the detective story, it is in fact a kind of Bildungsroman of middle age, a novel of moral and political awakening. Nevertheless, it is difficult to avoid comparisons with John le Carré. Hale's numerous allusions to Lewis Carroll, his diagnosis of the secret world as inherently paranoid, recall *The Looking-Glass War*, and his preoccupation with the gulf separating Western ideals and the ruthless expediency used to defend them is a characteristically le Carré theme. Le Carré's spy-speak for the CIA is "the cousins"; Hale uses "the good friends".

Le Carré said that he wrote *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* with passion, and Hale could presumably say the same of *The Whistle Blower*; but whereas le Carré achieves a sophisticated balance by allowing Leamas, the spy so deviously manipulated by his own service, to put the case for its morally offensive activities, Hale chooses to stoke up his polemical fire without providing any such defence.

WILLIAM GARNER
Rain's Alley
264pp. Heinemann. £8.95.
043428261 8

Morpurgo, central figure of William Garner's last thriller, *Think Big, Think Dirty*, has been demoted and moved sideways in British intelligence. His new chief, Epsworth, duplicitous and devious beyond measure, involves him in an operation conducted in rivalry with the CIA; the prize apparently the key to untold crude oil reserves. But plot and narration are as subtly tortuous as the characters, and Morpurgo has just as much difficulty in keeping up as the reader does. Good climactic scenes in Spain do something to redeem excessively intricate and elliptical build-up.

T. J. B.

Coming in one by one

Christopher Hawtree

BARBARA TRAPIDO
Naah's Ark
255pp. Gollancz. £8.95.
0375035013

Emotional chaos as created by international conference is rapidly forming a recognizable branch of English fiction. The podium itself is mercifully absent from *Naah's Ark*. Barbara Trapido's second novel, but all around its engaging heroine, the thrice-married Ali Glazer, men's brows crease from worrying about details, timetables and how much to stow in the flight-bag. For Ali, "who was capable of cutting cheese with her credit card on summer picnics - all manner of domestic improbabilities were after all made possible". This, the bemused opinion of her third husband, Noah, a "lung-man" in a local clinic, comes at the end of a fraught summer in which people from the past enter one by one during his absence and, through Ali's innocence, create a sequence of events which in other hands would seem the most improbable of farces. Barbara Trapido's wit can swiftly wound, but does not alienate the reader's delight in those characters who banter wittily for half an hour "on the subject of an esoteric letter controversy currently raging in the *Times Literary Supplement*".

The setting is not precisely stated at first, but the suspicions aroused by a snide reference to hand-made shoes from the excellent Duckers in the Turl are strengthened by the descriptions of someone's ever-changing lodgings in the Abingdon Road and confirmed by a confrontation with the Oxford police. The shoes belong to Noah. A year after her second husband, the boorish Mervyn, had finally left her for a student with a willing poster of Virginia Woolf blu-tacked to the wall, Ali was rushing to meet the deadline set by her eleven-year-old daughter, Camilla, for the supply of a name-tagged bag of sportswear. Almost knocked over by a motorist, she was held back by an angry young man, who was white's younger colleague, Arnie; it is the latter who is forced to live in the Abingdon Road, and involvement with the city's police comes from the hefty kick he gave to the road-hog's vehicle.

Such are the circumstances which brought

together the crowd of names on the opening page. The American connection apart, *Naah's Ark* has its origins in South Africa. Ali's childhood there led to infatuation with the long-lost Thomas Adderley and then to reluctant marriage to a brutish rugby-player who, two years earlier, had given her gonorrhoea at the age of sixteen. The only reminder of these days is William Lister, a perennial greasy revolutionary, whose devotion to part of the cause counterpoints the novel's theme of how the others have, little by little, adapted youthful ardour to meet the onset of comfort and wealth. Even Mervyn, by his espousal of such movements as women's rights, was

in the process of metamorphosing from person to personality. He had become a man who looked for his name in the *Sunday Times* birthday lists and felt himself slighted to find it omitted.

He plays a malicious part in the events which, complicated by her erratic younger children and an irascible neighbouring pensioner, distract Ali from the completion of the painting on which she had been steadily working. "When it came to the cut and thrust of articulate malice, her husband was no mean slouch", gloats Ali; in his absence, Trapido is a splendid substitute and carries along the tale with great descriptive gusto.

"There was nobody like Mrs Gaitskill for putting in sobering perspective the woes of one's own loins", observes Ali after her cleaning-lady has given a graphic description of a difficult birth. As she did in *Brother of the More Famous Jack*, Trapido also presents an array of alarming gynaecological detail: the recurring accounts of Ali's troublesome diaphragm; a metaphor revolving round an artichoke, which brings a new meaning to vegetable love; even a stray cat's "small, distended vulva was edged with blood".

As the novel reaches its close Ali looks at the canvas (now under commission by Noah's first wife) with a sudden intensity, finishes off the problematic oranges, and it is done; it is finished. Laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, she has had her vision, in which she saw the whole of her past life firmly bound together as a riotous black comedy upon which the curtain could now fall. One is left with the happy feeling that, given her offspring and associates, such a transformation will be improbable.

Family loves

Linda Taylor

URSULA HOLDEN
Eric's Choice
143pp. Methuen. £7.95.
0413556409

Eric, Violet (Eric's wife), Ivy (Violet's mother), Chester (Ivy's husband) and Charmian (Eric's mother): the names take turns to head the chapters of Ursula Holden's new novel. The perspective shifts as each character's bit of the story, or version of someone else's bit, emerges. As in much of her fiction, Holden is interested in harmonizing a collection of misfits. On the surface, the Cuive-Propps (Eric and Charmian), with their middle-class values of taste and control, have little in common with the Stubbs - vulgar, temperamental, working class. Symbolically, though, there's more in a name than class. The Cuive-Propps are cave-men at heart, propped up by fancy ideas. Eric, who "saw himself as [Violet's] saviour", ropes and beats his wife; he is capable of feeling that "he might not be able to control himself. He wanted to run amok with an axe". Charmian, similarly, constantly feels her control slipping: she hits Violet round the face. And Violet, having taken on the name, hits her mother

on her mouth and across her neck. She saw that smeared lipstick and hit it. This was power, she was hurting at last. The Stubbs family never went in for violence, she'd never been bashed in her life. She was a Cuive-Propp, behaving like Charmian. She was hitting and couldn't stop.

The Stubbs, although they can be stubby and blunt, have their vagaries: Ivy, away from Chester, twines unfaithfully; Violet's eye-catching prettiness is belied by her startlingly preposterous purple clothes and hair.

Eric, an apparently innocent idealist, is a teacher of English and a would-be writer of a play called *Family Loves*; with his deformed right hand (one finger, a misplaced thumb - "just like a pen" says Vee), he's a figure of shocked sympathy and a reminder of Charmian's buried guilt (she took tranquillizers while pregnant). His decision to marry his pupil Violet is romantic - "he'd seen her singing Jerusalem and become helpless". Eric takes Violet at face value, thinks he can mould his seventeen-year-old wife, with her Shadwell

junk stall background, to the niceties, the nautic exquisites, of the house on the green, decorated by his art-collector mother. Vee is his pet, his darling; together they will build Jerusalem (lines from Blake's poem provide the epigraph for the novel). They share sexual bliss on a Spanish package honeymoon and return to discontent. Eric is horrified when the house on the green transformed by Violet into a purple "paradise" of gaudy knick-knacks and tubular steel; Violet is bemused by Eric's disdain for her improvements.

Ursula Holden is adept at exposing the muddy complexities of her characters, the lurking bestiality behind the human proprieties. In this novel, an English cat, an American skunk and a Spanish dog are markers on the line of human unclassiness - they are both morally revealing and punitive. Violet keeps a cat, appropriately named Dick, which sleeps in her bed. Eric, intending to pet Vee, touches Dick. Dick bites Eric; Eric savages Vee; Vee and Dick run home to Shadwell. Chester, excluded by the reunited Ivy and Vee, becomes allergic to Dick - starts scratching and sneezing. Vee is forced to leave the "filthy beast" with Charmian, housekeeping for Eric while he goes to a writer's retreat in America. Dick and Charmian (tautly celibate) keep their distance. Meanwhile, Eric meets Fran, deformed in foot and eye. They go to bed. A skunk falls down the chimney of his woodland hut, gets in the sleeping bag. Eric and Fran stink of corruption. Back in London, Violet takes Ivy on a seaside holiday (a re-run of her honeymoon). Roman Catholic Ivy, who had kept her daughter "as fresh as cream" before marriage and who has never been abroad before, flirts with and makes love to the waiter. She's bitten by dog and dies of tetanus.

Holden's irony and humour, her economic prose, and her belief in the strengths of human frailty take the tragic edge off her revelations of dirtiness, deformity and death. With the mud disturbed and the beasts exposed, there's room in her scheme of things for the remaining four characters, plus baby, to make an oddly homogeneous group. "We know each other a bit better, after this lot, anyway," says Vee, and suggests that they appear on a television documentary called "The Secret of Family Love". It's a blackly, rather than bleakly, comic ending.

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Ivy still are the narrator's malleability and her use of nerve. If she can mimic her overbearing, she can also mimic her own capitulation, the ease and speed with which she colludes with them. After one put-down she exclaims: "I would seem to be unpopular with these characters. How long shall I continue to rush into over-friendliness obscurely to make up for the overfreeness of my solitude?" This sort of talk is not cancelled out by some such answer as "Let sex equal why." What is clear is the difficulty of reconciling, in a single fiction, word-play with the equivalent of the old theatrical aside. What we have in the end is a poignant tale of vulnerability and timid hope checked out with puns and portmanteaux, names and knowingness. In a word, a mixture.

Sarah McCoy's first collection of what may be called "prose pieces" (*Album*, 156pp., John Calder, Paperback, £3.50) privileges looking. The individual and idiosyncratic gaze is confirmed by the exotic, tropical topography the prose evokes, and by the extreme allusiveness and fragmentation of that prose. A highly charged succession of images - gasbags, gasbags, screechings, dazlings - repeatedly attest to heightened experience; and a childhood is consistently intimated, one lived in opposition to a straight-faced adulthood. It can seem as if the imagination has all been done for (or at) us, as if we are witnesses to, rather than partakers in, intensity. As the prose insistently parades its strangeness, as its allusiveness aggressively intrudes, it is the reader who may start to feel like the broughless victim in the hothouse of over-ripe language. A voice which is "poetic" threatens to yield to one which is private - guardedly and even hostilely so. The line between privacy slighted and privacy cited is a fine but crucial one.

But the plight is not just what a hostile or indifferent world has imposed; more destruct-

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Taking on the alien

Michael Hulse

LANDEG WHITE
For Captain Stedman
64pp. Harry Chambers/Peterloo Poets. £3.
090399772X
PAUL EVANS
Sweet Lucy
35pp. Durham: Pig Press. £2.90.
0903997746
RICHARD BURNS
Roots/Routes
44pp. Los Poetry Press. £4.50.
09149646323

Some years ago Landeg White published a useful study of V. S. Naipaul, and his own writing now proves to share many of Naipaul's concerns with the personal, political and historical problems raised by the borrowed cultures (Naipaul's phrase) which colonialism has left in its wake. Trinidad, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Zambia and Mozambique: these are the locations at White's poems, not in the spirit of orientalism which Kingsley Amis mocked ("I travel, you see") but in one of devotion to the task of understanding racial and national tensions.

"Province of Freedom", for example - set in Freetown, Sierra Leone - celebrates a pastoral tranquillity experienced with his "brown son" (White's wife is from Mozambique), but the poem's texture is enriched by the unease which informs the presentation:

The Botanical Gardens (former
War Department Property Keep
Out, former bush) are

back again, bananas wrapping
gun mounts and dog-latin
tags, a python's grip

on ironwood and the cannon
ball tree threatening the track
carried Martin down

across the once-bridged brook
and up to Heddie's ruined Farm.

The gun mounts and the botanical tags emblematically present the twin foundations of colonial rule - military power, and the defining power of European culture - while the reversal of the Botanical Gardens to bush, and the ruin of the farm and its bridge, point to the futility of attempts to impose an alien order. Here and in other poems White uses an understated and flexible variant of *terza rima* for his past-colonial observations, and the result can be a sharp terseness which reads like shorthand. James Fenton:

On the road,
liberated Pantheus
is murdered;

there are dew guerrillas
filling through
the tall grass.

White deploys his forms - *terza rima*, syllabic, stress-count lines, free verse - with a fine ear for ironic aptness: the approximate iambs of "Ministering" are wryly appropriate in an Achebe-like piece describing conflict between tribal origins and ministerial splendour, while the lush texture of the opening of "After the Revolution" recalls Matthew Arnold's "A Dream" and that poem's "river of Life". For *Captain Stedman* is a sensitive, carefully-crafted collection, which besides its alert colonial commentaries offers other pleasures - West Indian speech patterns zestfully recreated, or an evocative description of flamingoes - that make highly enjoyable reading.

John Greening also looks to Africa in *Westemers*, but his local point throughout is Egypt, and poems of the present are never far removed from a sense of the past which is rather more mythic than White's. This is not to say that Greening avoids socio-political comment; if anything, his observations on privilege and the moneyed classes are more acerbic than White's, as in his contrast (in "Ushabill") between the willing servant and the lady of the house where there are two crates of duty-free in

the boot / bring them up for me!"), or in these lines from the Oberoi Hotel at Aswan:

dates hang
above the swimming pool
unharvested

The rich old Europeans
their drugs
and their paunches
are fallen fruit
past ripeness
turning brown

In its economy, and to some extent its vocabulary, Greening's poetry in this manner can be reminiscent of the brief satiric observations in early Pound. A more meditative poet can be seen in his six poems on artefacts in Egyptian museums, the poems on Nefertiti and Cleopatra, and the long mythic poem "Lord of the West". *Westemers* suggests that Greening could be compared to Charles Boyle, who has also written poems from contemporary Egypt: Greening lacks Boyle's clear instinct for detail and for the essentials of a dramatic situation, but he has a more highly developed sense of the suggestiveness of human history.

Ric Caddell's *Pig Press* has now survived the passage of ten years, quite an achievement in the world of the small presses, and two of *Pig's* recent publications stand out as particularly deserving of attention. Carl Rakosi is a survivor of that loose "Objectivist" group that was active in Pound's ambit in the 1920s and 30s; his name comes to mind with Zukofsky, Oppen, Williams and Reznikoff, and his strengths and weaknesses remain similar to theirs. *Spiritus*, 1 contains the mellowed, meditative work of advanced age, but the poems are still powered by a forceful motor, as in the opening of the first piece:

Lord, what is a man?
He looks into a glass
and sees a physical figure
looking back at him,
the two waiting immobile
for him to reappear
as the world knows him,
by name, by work, by habits,
in what particulars
he is significant,
and . . . why should it be embarrassing
to speak of this?

. . . In what endearing . . .
The two-ply line favoured by Rakosi is a wiry, resourceful form that he uses with initiative, adapting it equally effectively to affectionate description of a goat and an epigrammatic reflection called "Walkers passing each other in the park":

Had I been eighty-five
he would have stopped
to compare notes,
but what was there
to talk about
with a man only sixty-five?

The dangers of such writing are that it can be too indulgent towards slight subject matter, and that it can result in pedestrian flatness if its rhythms are not always fully alert. Rakosi can provide examples of both failures, but he is nevertheless rewarding.

Paul Evans proves in *Sweet Lucy* to have a sense of dynamics in syntax which at times recalls Frank O'Hara, and writes much in that British bathetic manner that includes Monty Python. "I would like / the brazen muskrat flambé / with the sauce de beowulf", writes Evans in "In the Anglo-Saxon Tradition", and in "Happy Chinese New Year" he speculates whether Wordsworth ever ate curry. A poem dedicated to Hemingway is called "For whom the sleeping bag unrolls". This jokiness makes *Sweet Lucy* a lively collection though that same quality makes it tiring.

Finally, a selection of Richard Burns's poetry has been made for the American market, and comes illustrated with monotypes by Douglas Kinsey. Burns' somewhat self-consciously fits the word "entropy" into a context which makes it seem out of place: an awareness of certain trends in the 1960s in the United States seems to linger uncomfortably. At times he produces a Gothic grotesqueness which is not easy to take seriously: "tree of creation / free of destruction / temple planted / in an upturned skull / worming: woody / fibres more mythic than White's. This is not to say that Greening avoids socio-political comment; if anything, his observations on privilege and the moneyed classes are more acerbic than White's, as in his contrast (in "Ushabill") between the willing servant and the lady of the house where there are two crates of duty-free in

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TLS

The pain and the portmanteaux

George Craig

CHRISTINE BROOK-ROSE
Amalgamation
144pp. Manchester: Carcanet. £7.95.
0856359

A distinction used to be (perhaps still is) made between a compound, where diverse elements fused, and a mixture, in which they were merely added together. This novel is unquestionably a mixture, and rather an odd one, for it lays high verbal sophistication (an almost uninterrupted display of it) alongside a persistent concern with humiliation, loss and man's inhumanity to woman.

The "I" of the novel, a woman no longer young, deprived by "cuts" of her job as teacher of literature/philosophy/history, speaks her response to this and to the world in which she

must now move: the world of economic realism, power politics and the computer. It is likely that she has also lost her husband or lover and is learning to move too in the uncontrollable world of others' desires. The "suave and portly man at the National Education Computer" will explain her profound redundancy, hint of new possibilities but make clear that the price is a share of her bed. His approaches are presented with fastidious and allusive distaste and capped with "If he were someone in a nineteenth-century novel I might ironically detach him".

But this confident handling is verbal only. Her capacity to mock merely sharpens her awareness of how ineffective it is within her world: there will always be suave and portly men (and "portly" carries more than a hint of euphemism), and they will always get their way. Nor is there rescue in fantasy. In one recurrent sequence she is drawn to Orion; but

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